No. 639.] For Week Ending March 30, 1901. [One Penny.

SHORT STORIES

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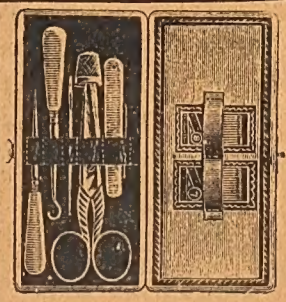

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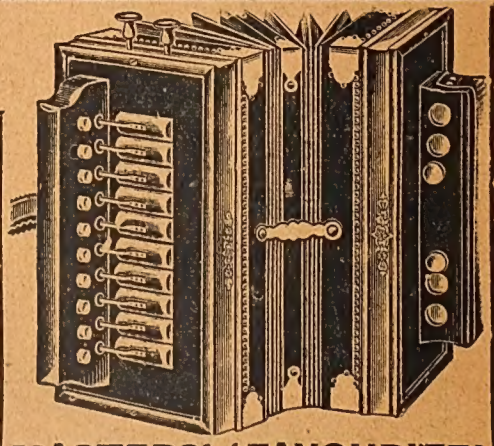

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 639.] For the Week Ending March 30th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE PUNISHMENT OF MAJOR MEREDITH.

As a rule, Mr. Pontifex lunched at an exclusive club in Pall Mall, where he was known as a clever sportsman, a genial companion, and a brilliant talker on every topic except those of law and crime, the subjects in connection with which his singular reputation had been won.

Once, and only once, was Mr. Pontifex drawn into a professional interview within the walls of his club, and that was on the occasion when he was consulted by Norman Meredith upon a matter strangely involving both that young Oxonian's life and happiness.

The great lawyer was given at times to enjoying his afternoon cigar in silence, and a luxuriously-padded corner of a certain fine smoking-room, near the War Office, was for long Mr. Pontifex's chosen lounge. Here he would sit over his cup of black coffee, a lithe and thoughtful figure, watching the smoke wreaths as they drifted from his lips to veil irregularly his glittering eyes.

It was upon such a reverie that Norman Meredith, a comparatively new member of the club—he had joined it on leaving his college at Oxford—ventured to intrude. He was a frank, good-looking Englishman, still a trifle youthful, and Mr. Pontifex was disarmed by the nervous apology with which he took a seat beside the reflective solicitor.

"Will you forgive me, Mr. Pontifex," said Norman Meredith, simply, "if I ask you to accept me as a client and to give me some advice upon a—a rather unpleasant affair. You do not know more of me than my name, it is true, and these are not your office-hours, but I must leave town almost immediately and an impulse to seek your aid came over me as I passed and saw you sitting there. Of course, I have heard much of you and your, may I say, mysterious talents."

Mr. Pontifex smiled.

"You are a born diplomatist, Mr. Meredith," he replied; "you flatter me and whet my curiosity in a breath. Well, and what can I do for you?"

His would-be client produced from the breast-pocket of a morning coat a small leather case and handed it, open, to the lawyer. It contained a delicate miniature of a girl on the verge of womanhood—a charming girl, almost a beautiful woman. The face was sweet and loyal—Mr. Pontifex, a shrewd student of the human countenance, was favourably impressed by it.

"That is the lady I hope to marry," observed Norman Meredith, sadly; "you will see, I fancy, Mr. Pontifex, that I am not the victim of any foolish infatuation. She is, as it happens, of my own station, and as good as she is pretty. Alas, others than I have succumbed to her innocent attractions. I have narrowly escaped falling a victim to them in a double sense; Mr. Pontifex, my most determined rival is my nearest relative—my uncle, Major Meredith, and of late he has repeatedly, though secretly, attempted my life."

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The lawyer glanced about him. The smoking-room was by no means crowded; their quarter of the apartment was deserted, and Norman Meredith had lowered his voice. Satisfied of their privacy, Mr. Pontifex turned towards his client.

"You are a man of education and intelligence, Mr. Meredith," he said curtly. "I suppose you have satisfied yourself of the truth of this terrible allegation."

"Naturally," was the answer. "Mr. Pontifex, I have guessed for some months that my uncle was in love with Dorothy Carruthers, and I regretted the rivalry. But I did not dream of attributing to it the series of accidents that befel me, though, considered together, they were significant enough.

His jaw set as he noticed their delicious absorption in themselves.

"When out shooting, my uncle's gun exploded at a stile, the charge just missing my head and blowing a keeper's hat off. Again, I was mounting into his dog-cart—he had suggested driving me to the station—when he loosed the reins, and the mare, a spirited brute, started forward, knocking me down and all but sending the wheel over me."

Mr. Pontifex nodded gravely; either of the mishaps described is, or should be, rare with a country gentleman.

"Then," added Norman Meredith, "there was an unaccountable fire at Caneton House, my uncle's place, in the suite below mine, and by which I was almost suffocated. Finally, a horse that he gave me for a birthday present proved a bolter, and nothing but a lucky leap saved me from sharing in an appaling smash-up. Yet it was not till I discovered my uncle as the author of a diabolical trap especially laid for my unsuspecting feet, that I realised the danger to which my love for Dollie had exposed me."

"Go on," said the lawyer, for his client had paused to contemplate the vivacious portrait of Miss Carruthers.

"I beg your pardon," responded the young Oxonian, putting away the case blushingly. "At Caneton House, you must understand, we have a pretentious dancing-hall with a gallery round all four sides. Beyond this is a seldom-used wing, and in order to cross to the wing without following the circuit of the gallery, the hall is crossed by a kind of telescoping bridge. On high days and holidays this can be withdrawn, to leave the lofty sweep of the hall unbroken. Ordinarily, it is extended and locked in position. You comprehend?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Pontifex. His cigar had gone out; he had begun to play with his sapphire ring.

"After the fire of which I spoke," pursued his client, "I moved into the wing beyond the dancing-hall, and consequently had to cross the bridge—in darkness—each night. Going to my room late one evening, I happened while on the bridge to strike a match and relight my cigarette. Tossing it down it passed apparently through the bridge, and flickered to the gloomy depths of the hall below. The bridge was open at its further end!"

The solicitor whistled softly. Otherwise, he made no comment.

"I knew that my uncle kept the key of the telescoping arrangement," said Norman Meredith, "and in an instant it flashed upon me that he wished to murder me. Concluding that he would be on the watch to close the bridge after I had met my intended doom, I had recourse to strategy, and, allowing my cigarette to go out and muttering a loud curse upon my last match, I retraced my steps. As I passed over the gallery proper I will swear that I saw my uncle hiding in the shadow."

The speaker studied Mr. Pontifex's expression—it told him nothing of the solicitor's mind.

"I stayed in the library till dawn," continued Mr. Pontifex's client; "and then returned to find the bridge closed. The same day I left Caneton House and travelled to London, where I have remained since. But there is a ball to-night at Caneton House and Dollie will be there. I cannot leave my uncle in sole possession of the field. I am going back, possibly to be caught at last in a successful snare. On the very point of departure I caught sight of you and wondered if you could help me. I have no evidence against my uncle, not even that of jealousy. I am not admittedly engaged to Dollie, nor has he proposed for her. His attempts to destroy me sound, as I relate them, like the sick fancies of my own brain. Yet I feel to see Dollie again I am risking my life."

Mr. Pontifex rose and shook his loose frock-coat into order.

"You shall go back Caneton House," he decided; "and you shall not risk your life very seriously, that is, if you will take me with you—not ostensibly as your lawyer, but as your friend."

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"With pleasure," cried his client; "but what will you do there?"

The solicitor's brows wrinkled over his peculiar eyes, and he laid a strong palm on the other's shoulder.

"Wait and see," was his advice. "At the moment, permit me to send for my dressing-case and a bag; I keep a travelling outfit at the office." And he strolled out of the smoking-room to dispatch a messenger.

* * * * *

The early evening of the October day found him, together with Norman Meredith, in the heart of Bedfordshire.

Caneton House was a medley of buildings, of which, as is frequent among large and rambling country residences, only one block was properly occupied. Next to this particular portion of Caneton House stood the large dancing-hall described by Norman Meredith, and, beyond it, the practically disused wing in which he had taken up his abode after his escape from the fire of which he had told Mr. Pontifex.

This much of the geography of the old mansion, his client pointed out to the solicitor as they walked round it before entering. The dancing-hall was ablaze with light, and through the tall windows floated the sound of servants' voices. The completing touches were being put to the preparations for the evening's entertainment.

The lawyer was anxious to obtain a glimpse of Major Meredith and begged to be introduced without delay. Norman Meredith sought out his uncle and, with a creditable degree of dissimulation, escorted him to the library, where he made him acquainted with the lawyer.

"Delighted to know any friend of Norman's," said the Major effusively.

He was a big man, with a thin iron-grey thatch, a full moustache, a thick neck, a gaze half-bullying, half-shifty.

Mr. Pontifex assumed a jovial, sporting air, and Major Meredith grew quickly persuaded that his nephew's companion was a perfectly familiar type of visitor.

But when he dismissed them to dress, Mr. Pontifex noticed that his glance followed his nephew stealthily, and that he chuckled to himself.

He was unmistakably pleased at his young kinsman's reappearance.

Their toilet finished, Norman Meredith showed the lawyer from corridor to corridor of the vast residence, emerging on the gallery of the dancing-hall, in which the Major had already begun to receive his guests of the night.

"This," said Norman Meredith, halting in the middle of one of the longer sides; "is where the bridge shoots out, as you see, it is drawn back now to leave the vista of the hall clear. The apparatus for working it is inclosed in this box, the key of which my uncle keeps."

Mr. Pontifex leant over the balastrade and calculated the distance to the floor beneath.

"It is only twenty feet or so," he concluded; "a light weight like you could swing from the ledge and drop the remainder, say twelve feet, easily. Of course to drop without warning, and probably head-first, would mean death or crippling."

He stopped abruptly.

"Will they replace the bridge to-night?"

"Oh, yes," his client assured him; "I, at least, will sleep in the far wing, as you may, if you choose."

"I must do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Pontifex peremptorily, "get me estab ished as closely as you can to the last corridor through which we came just now."

"You have an idea," Norman Meredith told him, excitedly; "what is it?"

Suddenly there was a stifled cry.

The solicitor frowned.

"I never confess to ideas, Meredith," he declared drily; "until I have translated them into actions."

He surveyed critically the hall beneath—it was filling rapidly.

"Look," he added; "is not that fair lady who is being welcomed by your uncle, the original of your miniature?"

"It *is* Dollie!" said his impulsive client. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Pontifex; I will snatch a few words with her and then rejoin you."

"Very good!" assented the lawyer calmly; "I will sit up here like poor Jack's cherub and admire. Positively the sight of Miss Carruthers in the flesh makes me sympathise with your uncle."

Norman Meredith, disregarding this piece of banter, hurried off, and Mr. Pontifex, litting a chair to the gallery railing, pondered the scene before him. Dorothy Carruthers was indeed a beautiful girl, and the Major

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did not seen inclined to yield her to his nephew. The gleam that shot from his steely pupils as she accepted the latter's arm and moved away, laughing, was seized by the keen scrutiny of Mr. Pontifex—there was in it an unmistakable passion of hatred. Luckily, no one but the solicitor appreciated the fact, and the next instant the Major was his bowing, simpering self once more.

"A dangerous man!" murmured Mr. Pontifex; "he must be dealt with promptly—and firmly."

Having registered this statement, he abandoned his chair and strolled down into the hall. Norman Meredith and Dorothy Carruthers were waltzing—they were a handsome couple, and obviously in love. Each whispered to each as they danced; a rosy glow flushed the girl's happy face. Mr. Pontifex made his way to Major Meredith.

"Congratulations, Major," he said; "you know how to do these things, and no mistake; I could imagine myself in London instead of the country. And, by the bye. I'm afraid Meredith forgot to say that he and I are only on a flying visit—we must see town again to-morrow."

The Major's features twitched.

"I am sorry you contemplate such a short stay," he answered absently—his gaze had settled on his nephew and Dorothy Carruthers. His jaw set as he noted their delicious absorption in themselves. Mr. Pontifex added a trivial remark and left his host with graceful ease. At the end of the waltz he secured Norman Meredith for a hasty intimation.

"You and I leave Caneton House to-morrow," he said briefly, "don't trouble about explanations, they will do later. Meantime, introduce me to some nice people; even a lawyer's toes get tapping to such music as this."

His young client laughed, apologised, and did as he was bidden. Mr. Pontifex speedily showed himself one of the best waltzers in the company, and with an ample choice of partners the night flew pleasantly for the solicitor.

When he saw Norman Meredith next, the final carriage had rolled away down the drive and, but for attendants, the dancing-hall was empty. Up in the gallery a manservant was winding a little steel crank and the curious telescoping bridge of Caneton House was extending itself across the wide apartment. The lawyer and his client watched it mutely until it had spanned the hall; then Mr. Pontifex touched the latter's elbow.

"Come and have a cigar in the winter-garden," he proposed; "but first say good-night to your uncle. And, oh, just mention that you intend to lounge and smoke for an hour before you go to bed."

Norman Meredith acted on the recommendation, somewhat puzzled as to the lawyer's motive.

"You arranged for me to sleep anywhere but in that confounded wing?" queried Mr. Pontifex, as they gained the winter-garden.

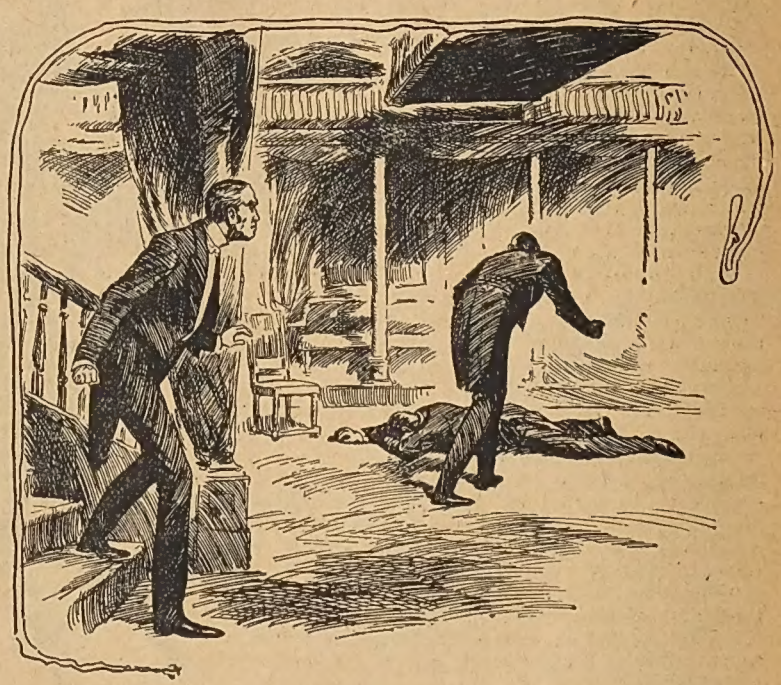
"Most particularly," said his client, "but I can't imagine what you're driving at."

"It is not a very difficult riddle," responded the lawyer; "you and I have announced our intention of returning to town to-morrow, you have rendered your uncle desperate by your flirtation with Miss Carruthers this evening, and in an hour you are about to cross that bridge—alone, for I sleep on this side of the hall. It is unlikely that you will be seized, as you were on a lucky occasion, with a fancy to retrace your steps."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Norman Meredith. "You believe——"

"That the Major will set the same trap for you," said Mr. Pontifex. "I am sure of it. But let us have our cigars, and allow him all the time he can require."

They penetrated deeper into the dusty quiet of the winter garden, and Mr. Pontifex unfolded his instructions.



"Coward! traitor!" vibrated Mr. Pontifex's slow syllables.

"If all falls out as I expect," he pursued, "you must walk boldly to the gap, bend down, touch the extremity of the bridge, swing to your arm's length, and drop on your feet. Then double up, fall in a heap, sham death, and leave the rest to me. I will see to your uncle."

"You are a daring plotter, Mr. Pontifex," said his client, astonished.

"Am I?" asked the solicitor; "I do but anticipate how men will act under certain circumstances. I cause those circumstances to arise, and having done so, stand by and watch. That is my method—interesting, but not complex."

He puffed at his Havana till it shone redly in the gloom, got out his gold hunter, and, by the radiance of the cigar-tip, examined the dial.

"An hour to wait," he said, and sat down under a tall fern-tree.

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Norman Meredith will remember for many years that hour's talk in the winter-garden of Caneton House. Mr. Pontifex, as has been hinted, was, when in the mood, a fascinating talker, and his young client felt the fascination—the sixty minutes might have been ten. At length Mr. Pontifex rose.

"Come," he said, and together they passed out of the lofty glass building into the corridors of Caneton House.

Not far from the gallery of the dancing-hall the lawyer stopped.

"I must make no noise," he murmured; "as for you, walk firmly, even loudly. Pass boldly on to the bridge, and if, as I expect, it proves open, act in the fashion I described to you."

Norman Meredith obeyed. Entering the species of high balcony around the hall he perceived that he was alone, Mr. Pontifex had halted.

The solicitor paused in the corridor that gave upon the gallery. He was certain that he could see, in a shadowy recess just ahead, a vague form which leant out to watch the figure of Norman Meredith. Mr. Pontifex stole up inch by inch.

Suddenly there was a stifled cry, an interval and then a thud. His young client had found the solicitor's prophecy correct, and had carried out his advice. He had precipitated himself skilfully to the pavement beneath.

The indefinite form, on which Mr. Pontifex had his eye, crept out and moved to the part of the gallery where the telescoping gear was fixed. There was a faint creak or two and a slight jar. The bridge had evidently been closed,

The lawyer held his breath. What would the Major (for Mr. Pontifex had no doubt that the vague form was his host's) do now? Straining his vision, the solicitor saw a dim outline tip-toeing along the gallery, towards the angle from which a flight of stairs reached the hall below. Mr. Pontifex followed.

To the bottom level of the large apartment he tracked the gliding shape and pursued it almost to the spot where, in a ray of the waning moonlight that pierced a ground-floor window, Norman Meredith lay in an ugly mass, face downwards and apparently senseless. By the pale radiance that glimmered about him, Mr. Pontifex was able to assure himself that the unconscious subject of his pursuit was indeed the Major.

In a screening patch of profound gloom the solicitor stayed his course, and peered after the other as he stooped over the prostrate body of Norman Meredith. The moonbeams dwelt on the Major's features; they were distorted and ashen. He bent over to touch the seeming corpse, but shrank from it.

Mr. Pontifex's client lay perfectly motionless, the lawyer—delighted with the success of his plot—was meditating a leap upon the Major. It would need little more than a swift *resumé* of Norman Meredith's suspicions, and a brief account of the lawyer's device, to demonstrate to the imagined murderer that he was henceforth in the power of his fancied victim. How he would stare when the supposed dead sprang up to bear witness to the fact!

Mr. Pontifex started. An audacious idea had struck him. He shivered at it himself, but executed it with characteristic promptitude. In low, sibilant tones he spoke distinctly a couple of singular sentences. The words came to the Major's ear and arrested his attention.

"Coward, traitor, murderer!" vibrated Mr. Pontifex's slow syllables; "a curse be on you now and hereafter! Norman Meredith, arise and haunt your slayer!"

Astonished beyond measure at this unexpected and mysterious order, in which, nevertheless, he recognised Mr. Pontifex's voice, the lawyer's young client lifted his head and then sat up. The moonbeams lent his countenance a ghastly, pallid hue.

A fearful shriek rang to the roof of the dancing-hall. Major Meredith covered his face and collapsed, shuddering violently. He began to chatter to himself, breaking occasionally into an unearthly howl.

"In Heaven's name, what shall we do?" whispered Norman Meredith. "He will rouse the entire household."

"Quite so," said Mr. Pontifex, contentedly; "see, here come servants and candles already."

The lawyer was right. A terrified footman, in trousers and a blanket, had thrust a taper over the gallery balustrade. The Major pointed at the light and gibbered.

"Is someone being killed down there?" cried the footman, tremulously.

Mr. Pontifex strode across the hall and looked up.

"It is your master, Major Meredith," he called sternly. "We found him wandering about and screaming. Bring lights, quickly."

And in the chill dawn of the October morning, the dancing-hall was re-illuminated, while his nephew and a bewildered valet led the Major to his bed-room—a shrieking lunatic.

Long after the Major had been consigned to a private asylum and Norman Meredith, married to the charming Dorothy, was administrator and practical owner of the Caneton estates, the latter put a daring question to Mr. Pontifex, who was spending a week-end in Bedfordshire.

"Did you really mean to unhinge my uncle's mind?" he asked, anxiously; "of course, I know it was the best thing that could have happened, for he undoubtedly deserved the gallows. But I have never been quite certain as to whether it was an accident or not."

The solicitor wrinkled his brows over his glittering eyes and smiled to himself.

"I am not sure," he said, drily; "it was more in the nature of an experiment."

And that was all the information Norman Meredith could get out of him.

No Better Cure!

PHYSICIAN to PATIENT. "Yes, sir, there is not the slightest doubt that you are suffering from a severe depression caused by a sharp liver attack."

PATIENT. "And what remedy would you suggest, Doctor?"

PHYSICIAN. "Well, sir, my strongest recommendation to you is to get a copy of Mr. Arnold Golsworthy's merrily irresponsible book, "The New Master," and read a chapter or two daily, and that will soon put you right. I cannot think of a better cure for anybody who is suffering from the 'blues.'"

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A Comedietta, by H. Goldsmith Whitton.*

CHARACTERS.

AUBREY DE VERE. . . . . OLGA LANGUISH.

SCENE:—*Vestibule of Hotel.*

AUBREY: Well, of all the stupid out-of-the-way holes, commend me to this beastly place. It's been raining now for days, and there's absolutely nothing to be done but eat and smoke, and there's not a single soul worth talking to, except Miss Languish, and she's always monopolised by that sickening idiot Thompson. What's a fellow to do? I'll go and see if the mail's in. [*Exit* AUBREY, *right.*

(*Enter* OLGA, *left.*)

OLGA: That Thompson man bores me to death; there's no escaping from him. Rain outside and bores indoors. What's a girl to do? There's only one man in the place who looks as if he knew anything, and that's Mr. de Vere; but that horrid Mamie Saunders is always running after him, and I can only get in about three words with him. Whenever I begin to talk with him, she breaks in with her silly giggle (*imitating*), "You have no idea, Mr. de Vere, how charming the tomatoes look in the greenhouse! (*Giggles.*) Miss Languish, I think I heard your Aunt asking for you. It's too bad, dear, that you can't come with us to the greenhouse." Nasty, spiteful old thing! She must be thirty-five if she's a day, and old enough to know better. I suppose I ought to fetch my work. I'll keep my fingers busy, anyway. [*Exit* OLGA, *right.*

(*Enter both from opposite sides, he reading, she with work on arm, reading letter.*)

AUBREY: Absolutely nothing in the paper to-day.

OLGA: Only a tiresome dressmaker's bill.

[*Collide in middle of stage.*

AUBREY: I beg your pardon.

OLGA: It's nothing, I assure you; don't mention it.

[*Seat themselves far apart. He pretends to read paper, but looks at her, and she pretends to work, but glances at him. Their eyes meet, and both look away. Repeat.*

AUBREY: Very wet weather, Miss Languish.

OLGA: Yes, very.

AUBREY: Are you enjoying your stay here?

OLGA: Oh, immensely.

AUBREY: It's more than I am, then.

OLGA: Well, it is rather dull in wet weather.

AUBREY: Why can't people do something? It's so stupid here; everybody sits around, the women talking about each other.

OLGA: And the men smoking like chimneys—such bad cigars, too.

AUBREY: (*Groans.*) Oh! (*Goes on reading.*)

OLGA: It is stupid. (*Short pause.*)

AUBREY: Why can't they get up something? Could we not act a piece or something of the sort?

OLGA: That's not a bad idea, but where are we to find a play? There's nothing in the library but *Hamlet*.

AUBREY: We'd hardly be up to Shakespeare, I'm afraid.

OLGA: Don't you think Miss Saunders would make a fine Ophelia? (*Face.*)

AUBREY: I think your friend Mr. Thompson would make an ideal Hamlet. (*Face.*) Hamlet should be played by a fat man. Ha, ha, ha! I'll tell you what we'll do, Miss Languish, why bother about Shakespeare, *we* might write a play ourselves.

OLGA: What fun! I wonder if we could? Let's do it.

AUBREY: First thing is to find out who can act. Let me see. There is the treacle man's family. I don't think they'd do. I don't think they're classy enough.

OLGA: They're too awful for words—they're always looking for h's and picking them up at the wrong

* For permission to perform this comedietta write, "EDITOR, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C."

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times. I heard the little fat one say this morning, "Hamy, can I 'elp you to some beggs?"

Aubrey: I admit they *are* bounders. Then there's the De Ponsonby-Smythes. They're above that sort of thing.

Olga: Yes, it would take hot irons to thaw them.

Aubrey: What about the o'd professor?

Olga: Oh, he's so dreadfully absent-minded he'd forget his part and start an argument with the prompter on the origin of destiny. I suppose the learned Miss Gookins with the spectacles wouldn't condescend to act?

Aubrey: Brrrrrr! I'd be afraid to ask her.

(Olga *laughs.*)

Aubrey: The old General, eh?

Olga: He'd be perfectly unmanageable at the rehearsals, his temper is vile.

Aubrey: What do you think of young Simpson? Wouldn't he do for a walking gentleman?

Olga: Walking stick, you mean. That bashful boy, why he blushes when anyone even looks at him, he'd sink through the floor with fright when his turn came to speak.

Aubrey: Well, of course, there's your friend, Mr. Thompson. I don't think he'll do exactly.

Olga: No, I don't think he would. (*Pause.*) I suppose you'll give Miss Saunders a good part?

Aubrey: Oh no; leave her out.

Olga: There's only that old lady and her companion.

Aubrey: You mean the lunatic and her keeper?

Olga (*laughing*): Oh, they're out of the question.

Aubrey: Well, it comes to this Miss Languish, there's only you and I left. Perhaps it's better to confine ourselves to a small cast and do the thing really well. Let's set to work. You sit down there, and I'll fetch some paper. Here's pen and ink. (*Opens drawer.*) Oh, here's some paper, this will do. Let me see, you want a penwiper.

Olga: Never mind.

Aubrey: You *are* uncomfortable, let me get you a footstool, and a cushion for your back.

Olga: Thanks. Have *you* everything now? Then let's begin, (*Both sit biting the ends of their pens and look blankly at each other.*)

Aubrey: Have you thought of anything?

Olga: No, have you?

Aubrey: Not yet. (*Both groan.*) Of course, I have several ideas, but I'm afraid they'd hardly suit; one must be very careful with a mixed audience.

Olga: Yes, that's true.

Aubrey: You know I think we'll have to fall back on a simple love story. Nobody could object to that. Don't you think that's the best idea?

Olga: Love story, ye-es. It's not a subject I know very much about——

Aubrey: I'm sorry I can't believe you.

Olga: What do you mean? (*Indignantly.*)

Aubrey: Well, it's not for me to make any remarks, but it seems to me that—well, of course——

Olga: I never flirt.

Aubrey: Of course, you can call it by another name, but when other fellows cannot get a word in edgeways—I—we—one would naturally suppose that you——

Olga: Oh, you mean Mr. Thompson. He's very nice.

Aubrey: So it would appear.

Olga: Well, you needn't talk, "Glass houses and stones," you know. "Have you seen the charming tomatoes this morning, Mr. de Vere." Was it *only* the tomatoes?

Aubrey: How absurd. Miss Saunders is old enough to be my mother.

Olga: To tell you the truth Mr. Thompson is very tiresome.

Aubrey: Oh, I'm glad you think so.

Olga: Are you, really? (*Recollecting.*) Oh, I say, we have not written a word yet.

Aubrey: Oh! yes, I forgot; we must get to work. Um! Ah! I've got an idea!

Olga (*eagerly*): What is it?

Aubrey: No, it won't do. Wait a minute, yes—yes—no. There—I thought of something, but I can't think what it was.

Olga: That's too bad. Let me see. Oh! I do feel so stupid.

They collide in middle of stage.

Aubrey (*triumphantly*): Hold a minute; here I have it; it is splendid, simply magnificent, just what we want, and, if we act it, why, it's sure to be a success. Don't you think it will do?

Olga: What will do?

Aubrey: Why the plot, of course. We shall have a tragedy in one act. Two disconsolate lovers, just like you and I. I mean you and I are just like two disconsolate lovers—no, not that—two people who—oh! *you* know what I mean—a handsome youth and a beautiful girl, resolve to commit suicide. They meet by chance in the topmost tower of a baronial castle, having decided to fling themselves over the balcony into the cruel lake below.

Olga: What for?

Aubrey: Don't you understand? They are tired of this hollow mockery termed life. I can see them as they stand, hand in hand, and take the fatal plunge into the limpid waters of the pellucid lake.

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Olga: Oh, I don't think that would do at all. How could we manage the lake? There's only a leaky bath in the hotel, and it would be silly to see two people standing in that. Besides, what could I wear. Of course, I could put on that bathing-dress I had at Dieppe last summer, and let my hair down, although it would come out of curl. That might do, but if you were wearing a tall hat and a frock coat, I think people would laugh at us.

Aubrey: I don't see where the fun comes in. I think the idea is very poetic. Can *you* suggest anything?

Olga: They might both take poison together. It would thrill the audience to see the deadly drug gradually take effect.

Olga: Well, I object to kissing.

Aubrey: It strikes me they would look more like two gasping fish out of water.

Olga (*coldly*): Do you think so? I think it would be a very pretty death.

Aubrey: What if they both blew their brains out together?

Olga: Oh, no, that's too messy! Besides, where are we to get the brains from? (*Pause.*) No, I think that the best plan is for the girl not to die at all.

Aubrey: Then you would stand by and see me die alone?

Olga: Oh, no, I don't mean that. You see, I might forget to have anything to kill myself with, and I would go out to get a carving knife. Meanwhile, you would have had a fit and died in great agony. Of course, you'd have to keep up the dying long enough to give me time to change my dress, and then I could come in wearing a smart, half-mourning costume and pretend to cry over you.

Aubrey: I'm afraid people would think that rather selfish on your part. I've an idea. Why not let us live and fall in love with each other?

Olga: Oh, that would be nice—I mean in the play.

Aubrey: Yes, of course, only in the play.

Olga: Can't there be some dying, anyhow? It's too bad to give it up entirely, it would make such a good scene.

Aubrey: Ye—es, it might if you'd die with me.

Olga: It would be more dramatic if I watched *you* die; the agony of my grief would be so nice to act.

Aubrey: Then you would really care if I died?

Olga: I should care very much—I mean, don't you think she ought to feel very sorry?

Aubrey: Of course she would. But they might fall in love anyhow, and there might be a touching farewell. He with her hand in his, and she, forgetting all but the awful fact that he's to be taken from her, throws her arms round his neck.

Olga (*horrified*): Oh, must I?

Aubrey: Yes, he would take her hand, like this (*suits action to words*) and tell her of his undying love. Her arms would be gradually stealing round his neck; you must do it now or I shall lose my inspiration.

Olga (*meekly*): Like this—in the play, of course.

Aubrey: Yes, otherwise I can't go on.

Olga: If it is necessary for the sake of the play, I suppose I can sacrifice my own feelings.

Aubrey: Don't say that, you don't really mind much, do you?

Olga (*hesitatingly*): Well, ye—es, naturally, it seems strange; but, of course, we're only rehearsing.

Aubrey: Then he says, "My darling, tell me you can care for me, and I will live for your sake. My life shall be yours, and you will make existence exquisite from henceforth, or if you say me nay, you will drive me to desperate deeds."

Olga: But will they understand what you mean?

Aubrey: Yes, why not? "Oh, fairest flower in nature's field, I will live for thee. I have loved you since first we met, loved you with all my heart and all my soul. Can you love me just a little, dear one?"

Olga (*slowly*): I—I—perhaps——would she say that?

Aubrey: And then they kiss.

Olga: No, they don't.

Aubrey: To preserve the dramatic sequence it is absolutely necessary.

Olga: It doesn't seem necessary to me.

Aubrey (*indignant*): But have you ever seen a proposal without a kiss?

Olga: That depends, and this is only on the stage.

Aubrey: But we must make it true to life for all that.

Olga: Well, I object to kissing.

Aubrey: That's so like a woman, you say you object but you give no reason.

Olga: Men are so stupid, they never understand.

Aubrey (*decidedly*): Let us be in again. I say—*he* says—to you—to *her*, I mean, "Fairest blossom on nature's tree, can you love me a little, only just a little?"

Olga: I can, Aubrey.

(*They kiss.*)

Aubrey: Olga, my darling, you have made me the happiest man on earth. My own dear little woman, I cannot believe it. It's too good to be true. You really love me.

Olga: Of course I do, Aubrey, I *am* so happy.

(*They kiss. Dinner gong heard.*)

Olga (*very loud*): What about the play?

Aubrey: Never mind the play, it is only for private performance.

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THE LION'S WARS

The New Zealand War.

1860-5.

WHEN the traders of the Southern seas, some sixty years ago, following in the footsteps of the missionaries, visited New Zealand, they soon saw that the scarcity of reptiles and wild beasts, the sparseness of the native population, and above all the mildness of the climate, and the fertility of the soil, rendered the country admirably suited for colonization.

In due course, the colonists arrived and then, as settlers have always done, came into collision with the natives over the land.

The early settlers in New Zealand were confronted with greater difficulties than those which beset their brethren of Australia.

The Maoris, as the natives of New Zealand were called, although never numbering more than 150,000, were a splendid race. Physically, the men were as big as ourselves, and their mental aptitude was so great that they soon acquired the practices and habits of civilized people.

In 1840 the Maoris were cannibals and practised slavery. In 1860 they wore European clothes, lived in houses like the settlers, drank tea, smoked tobacco, brought their disputes for settlement into our courts of law, were obedient to our rule, treated us with respect, and were never happier than when conversing with the British on such subjects as trade, ships, flour, racing, ploughs, horses, cattle, and wheat, but they never touched on land. They hated that subject, because they saw we had fixed longing eyes on their country.

In 1859 the value of the produce exported by the colonists was only £500,000, and, as the population at that time exceeded 59,000 souls, this was thought much too little.

So we raised our price and prevailed on some of the natives to sell. But this soon gave rise to grave disputes.

The Maoris loved the gold we gave them, but the tastes engendered by civilization being expensive, the money soon went and they found themselves angrily eyeing the white man who owned the land.

As all the natives were interested in the soil, some of the tribes set up a claim that their assent was necessary to make the sale binding.

Something similar to this had existed in Scotland in the old clanship days. The custom may have worked well in Scotland, but the settlers, having to pay cash down, naturally refused to recognise the collective ownership of tribes.

Quarrels led to fighting, and as the young bloods were anxious to try a fall with the whites, some of the tribes rose in rebellion.

At the outbreak of the war at Taranaki in 1860 the Waikatos held aloof from the revolt for nearly a year, not from want of sympathy with the natives, but because they possessed a large amount of property which they were unwilling to sacrifice.

The Waikatos must have had a shop-keeping instinct equal to our own for they had many flour mills at work, driven by wind and water.

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They ground the wheat which they grew, and sold it in Auckland, and the overseers engaged to look after their businesses were nearly always British.

But the Waikatos were drawn into the war at last, and the fighting then became general. These Waikatos proved themselves to be the most formidable of all our opponents.

Still no one anticipated that the natives would be able to withstand our troops, especially as the mode of warfare practised by the Maoris was well-known to the Government at home.

In the New Zealand war of 1844, although they exhibited much bravery and skill, we contrived, after much hard fighting, to subdue them, and capture Honi-Heki and Raupasaha, two great chiefs.

This experience did, or should, have given us such a knowledge of the country that it was generally supposed that the new war would be of short duration, instead of which it dragged on for years.

In many respects, the New Zealand war of 1861-3 greatly resembled the Boer war of 1899-1901. In neither instance could the authorities provide the generals with reliable maps of the country and in neither case had they any idea of the strength of the opposing forces. Notwithstanding the war of 1844 the War Office believed the country was flat, possibly because the sea coast was level. Whereas, mountainous New Zealand was most difficult to traverse covered as it then was with almost inaccessible forests.

Vague allusions were made about the war in Parliament in 1862 but as the Ministry regarded the Maoris as a race of weak and unwarlike Polynesians, reinforcements were not deemed necessary. Munitions of war, however, were.

So they sent a quantity of camp stores in every way lsuitable for a European campaign, but certain to be of ittle service against an agile foe fighting in a country singularly adapted for guerilla warfare. Our troops wanted light field pieces, and handy commissariat waggons, instead of which they were sent heavy Armstrong guns and monstrous waggons.

The military authorities in New Zealand exhibited even more ignorance. Some years before they had formed a force of Maori police drilled and trained to the use of fire-arms. There was no difficulty in obtaining recruits, but there was in keeping them. As soon as a Maori considered himself efficient he deserted, and his place was taken by another who also disappeared as soon as we had taught him how to shoot straight.

The colonists had over and over again warned the authorities that the entire Maori nation were passing through the police force and that mischief would come of it, but to no purpose.

It was the same when the war broke out. The British officers scouted the idea of the natives they had trained being able to fight, and persisted in regarding them as a miserable lot of niggers. General Pratt who was placed in command of the forces, held similar views, but he was soon undeceived.

The first brush showed that the niggers were splendid fighters. The two forces came into collision. We charged of course after the usual volley, expecting the Maoris would run, but they did nothing of the sort. They waited till we were only ten feet away and then poured a deadly volley. We lost so many men in this fight that General Pratt resigned and returned to Australia.

As none of the Commanders who succeeded him displayed the slightest ability, and as our men, moreover, were being constantly lured into ambuscades, the Government reluctantly came to the conclusion that something must be done besides sending unsuitable artillery.

The war had already cost the country over three millions, and as continental nations were beginning to jeer at our inability to subdue a few savages the prestige of the country was considered to be involved. The Maoris must, therefore, be crushed and orders were sent to this effect.

Sir George Grey, the Governor of New Zealand and one of our greatest colonial governors, thought differently and made a great attempt to secure peace.

In 1863 he issued a proclamation declaring that as the Government knew nothing of the facts connected with the purchase of the land which had caused the war the transaction was null and void. The Maoris instantly regarded this manifesto as a sign of fear and refused to submit.

General Cameron was, therefore, instructed to crush the rebellion as speedily as possible, but he fared no better than his predecessors. Needless to say he also made the mistake of despising his foe. But his contempt for the Maoris was nothing to that entertained by his men. The Maoris it is true had beaten us but that was because they had been tackled wrongly.

They were soon to be undeceived.

At Puketekaure although the British had their bayonets, and were well supported by artillery they were driven from the field. What made the matter even worse was the smallness of the foe that defeated us. Not only were they few in numbers, but they were entirely destitute of artillery and had not a single bayonet.

Fancy the surprise our Tommies must have felt at being hustled off the field of battle by a foe armed only with old muskets and double-barrelled rifles, and driven off too at such a pace, that we had to leave all our dead and wounded behind.

The next day provided us with a fresh humiliation. The soldier of Britain who had come to regard the winning of battles as a sort of hereditary right had to remain in his intrenchments whilst the enemy, only a mile away, buried his dead.

Our next blunder was to allow the Maoris to build a Pah or native fort without trying to stop the work. The Maori leaders, being quite as able, if not indeed a good deal better than Sir Duncan Cameron, chose a most admirable site. They erected it in a narrow neck of land connecting the peninsula of Te Papa with the coast.

It was so clearly recognised as the key to the whole district that it was at once named the Gate Pah. Practically it was impregnable, for it could not be taken by a frontal attack, and from being surrounded by swamps could not be turned.

So soon as it was completed Sir Duncan Cameron gave orders for an instant assault, our force consisting of over 2,000 men, including a naval brigade of 200 seamen and a couple of gunboats. The force seemed ample especially as six mortars, eleven Armstrong guns, and two howitzers came up before the fight began.

The attack was made on the morning of April 27th, 1863. Success seemed certain, for during the night the 68th regiment and thirty seamen contrived to cross one of the swamps and take up a position in the rear of the Pah to cut off, although they were not hopeful, the Maoris' retreat.

The battle opened with a cannonade. Shot and shell

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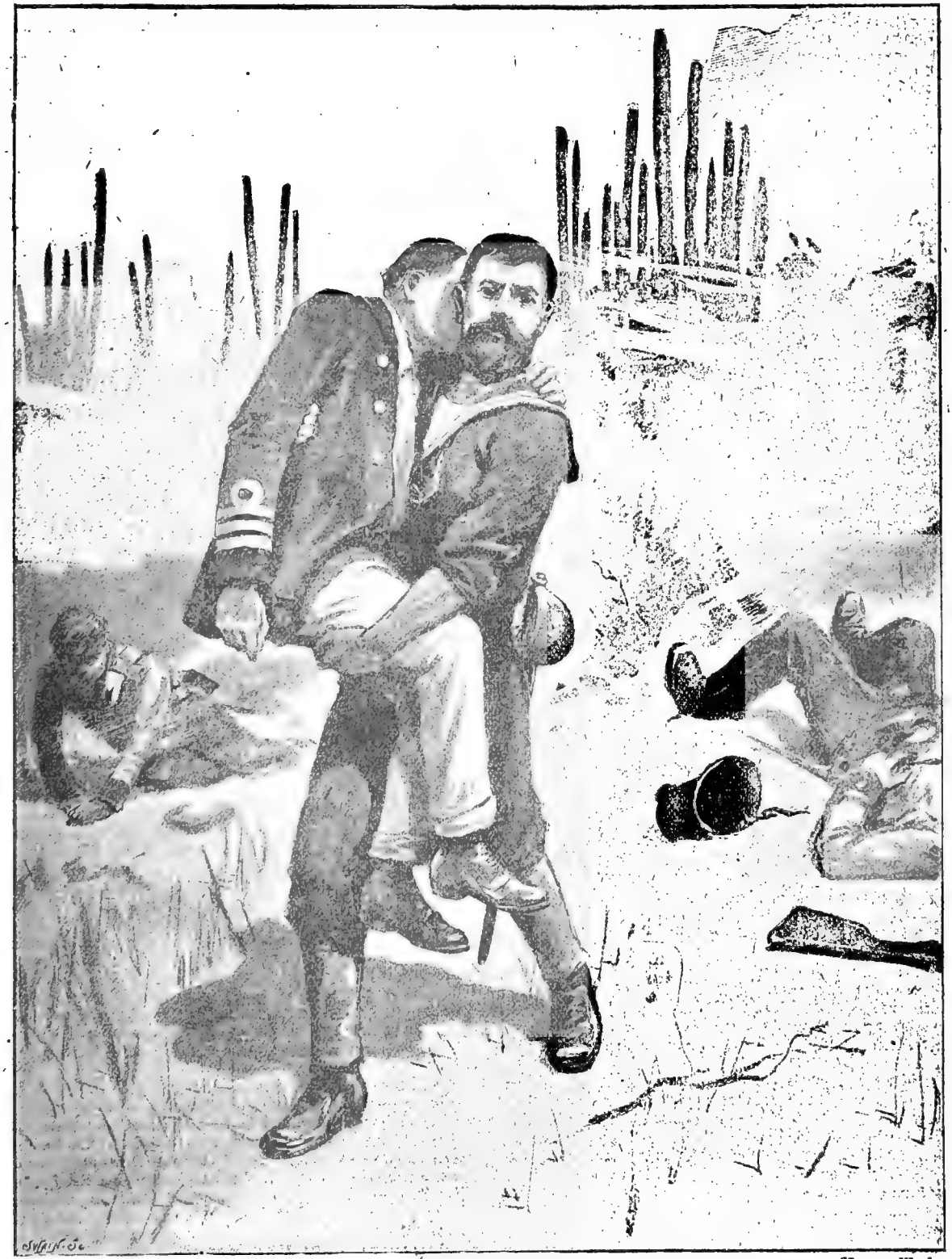

[Drawn by] Commander Hay was carried out by Samuel Mitchell, amid a storm of bullets. [Lawson Wood.

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were poured in with vigour for nine hours, and as everything remained quiet within the Pah, when it ceased Sir Duncan concluded that all the Maoris had been killed.

Still to make sure a storming party was formed which, after firing a number of volleys into the silent fort, gave three ringing cheers and rushed towards one of the breaches which our guns had made.

Across the ditch, up the embankment, sweeping into the Pah, like a great wave. All were rejoicing thinking the battle won, when suddenly volley after volley was poured into their midst. Thrown into instant confusion the soldiers rushed panic-stricken from the trap, to the dismay of their general who instantly ordered up the reserves.

To stem the retreat Captain Hamilton, R. N., placed himself at the head of the supports, a brave action which might have turned the fortunes of the day, but, unfortunately, he had not gone a dozen yards when a bullet crashed through his brain.

Bereft of their leader, the supports, the moment they mingled with the attacking force, became infected with panic too and despite the remonstrances of their officers fled down the narrow path with their comrades. The Maoris seeing this followed up the fugitives, pouring into the disordered ranks such a succession of deadly volleys that at last our troops, incredible as it sounds, fairly ran, never stopping till they reached their camp.

General Cameron was so upset at this untoward incident that he retired to his tent and was not seen for the next two days.

The great mystery as to where the Maoris hid themselves was made clear later when it was found, that to escape the artillery fire, they had provided themselves with underground chambers, the entrances to which were hidden behind branches so skilfully arranged that the Maoris were able to creep from their hiding-places before we were aware of their presence.

For the second time in this remarkable war the killed and wounded were left in the enemies' hands all save one, Commander Hay, who was carried out of the Pah by Samuel Mitchell amidst a storm of bullets. For this brave action Mitchell received the Victoria Cross.

Although greatly humiliated, the defeated soldiers and sailors were Britons, and when they grew tired of blaming each other, a feeling of exasperation set in.

Some of the "Fighting Forty-third" cried like children when they thought of what their forefathers had done in the Peninsular, and all the troops vowed as one man to teach the Maoris a lesson the next day.

The natives must somehow have got an inkling of our intention, for they stole away during the night.

Next day when our soldiers had recovered their lost courage, they charged Pah making straight for the hiding-place, the whereabouts of which had been discovered by our wounded, who had escaped during the night and crawled back to camp, but they found the birds flown.

It is a pleasure to turn from episodes like these to others, in which our soldiers appear at their best.

General Pratt although possessing few of the qualities of a great leader, was not without military knowledge. He had built a chain of redoubts to protect New Plymouth and garrisoned them with detachments of the regiments stationed in the country. Fort No. 7 was approached by a narrow defile bordered by dense bushes and gigantic ferns.

Captain Richards and a scouting party of the 40th, who held this fort, were returning home when they were received on entering the defile with a heavy fire from an unseen foe.

Although the order was given to extend in skirmishing order the firing was so deadly that in a few minutes only three wounded men and four muskets were left.

The three poor fellows scorning to sue for quarter managed to reach a large tree with the intention of holding out till assistance arrived from the fort.

Although the Maoris were only thirty feet away Sergeant Lucas, one of the survivors and a most expert shot, kept up such an incessant fire that the Maoris fearing that their prey would escape, left their hiding-place and charged the tree.

After Lucas had killed eight the Maoris retreated. A few minutes later another rush was made and again the assailants were driven back. At last the garrison appeared. Taking the natives in their rear they cut them to pieces. For his bravery Lucas was presented with the Victoria Cross.

This encounter led to a series of savage reprisals. In May 1863, two officers and eight men were fired on from the bush and killed. This was followed by a battle which was fought at the junction of the Manga-pike river with the Waipa. Here a detachment of infantry under Sir Henry Havelock were quartered close by the river where they frequently went to bathe, notwithstanding the presence of Maoris on the opposite banks whom they jocularly threatened by shaking their towels at them.

One afternoon these bathers whilst enjoying a swim were greeted with a volley from the enemy. Tommy did not remain long in the water after this. Rushing to the camp they quickly dressed and fired at their assailants who were largely reinforced. Our troops were also strengthened by arrivals from the station close at hand. The soldiers crossed the river on an improvised plank bridge.

Then the fight began. For over two hours the Maoris who thickly lined the precipitous banks, kept our men in the river bed, but the summit was reached at last. The combat which then ensued was remarkable from the fact that no directions were given. It was not so much a battle as a series of hand-to-hand encounters, the men and officers fighting like tigers.

The opportunity our men had been longing for had come. They wiped off old scores that day. They killed hundreds and drove the rest from the field. During the fight the Maoris endeavoured to lure us into an ambush but without success. It is said that over 300 Maoris were bayoneted in this fight.

During 1863 reinforcements had so poured in, that General Cameron found himself able to dispose of 25,000 men. The Maoris now fell back on a place with the curious name of Mere Mire, near the Waikoto river. Although greatly outnumbered they showed no fear. Their only artillery was two old ship guns and these, being without common shot, they loaded with large nails.

Still, they were not without advantages. They held an impregnable position, and what was even better for them, our Government at home had taken the management of the war into their own hands. The troops were burning to attack the Pah, but Downing Street had not decided on its plan of campaign, and till it did, Sir George Grey forbade General Cameron to stir. Delays in war are expensive. The one which occurred before Mere Mire cost the country over £1,000,000.

Permission to attack was given at last. The new comer had been regaled with wonderful stories of the

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Maori valour which, of course, coming of a phlegmatic unemotional race, he paid no attention to. He charged the Pah at Mere Mire at the point of the bayonet, and, to his intense disgust, found it empty. The Maoris had fallen back on another Pah at Rangiriri. We drove the natives from the earthworks of this fortress, but when the men reached the inner palisade charge after charge was repulsed. Then the engineers undermined the Pah, but the fuse was damp and the attempt failed. Then the troops tried again. A body of seamen nearly effected an entrance, but the fire was so hot that they too had to retreat. Under a capable general, the Pah would no doubt have soon fallen. Whether General Cameron ever would have succeeded is doubtful.

Fortunately, the Maoris helped him out of the difficulty by next morning hoisting the white flag. Great was our chagrin when we got inside to find that the prime instigator of the rebellion, a chief known as William Thompson, and the bulk of his followers had escaped.

Peace being impossible till we captured this warrior, our troops then marched to Piko Piko, a strong Pah on the summit of a mountain overlooking the Waipa.

After studying this Pah, for we were beginning to regard all New Zealand fortresses as death traps. General Cameron did what any tyro in tactics could have told him was the proper thing to do. He sent a strong detachment to the rear, burnt a couple of Maori villages, and cut the Maoris' communications.

He might have caught them too had he been a little smarter. As it was, the Maoris crept out one night and retreated further into the interior.

Still, blunder as we did, Mr. Atkins never missed a chance of displaying his qualities.

They came on an enormously strong Pah at Ohapau. It would have been better for the Maoris if we had come a week later for it was not quite finished. A dash at a weak spot, a sharp fight inside, and then straight for the underground chambers. The fight which ensued in one of these lasted four hours. When we left in the evening the whole of the gunners were dead.

An even more desperate fight was waged at Orakau Pah. In this encounter we expected an easy victory, as the force under Brigadier-General Carey was five times more numerous than the Maoris.

But their Pah was strong and the defenders the very pick of the Maori warriors.

A gap was made, guns were put in position, in fact, the most skilful appliances of military engineering were used against the place.

For a whole day 1,500 troops blazed away with shot, shell, grape, canister, and hand grenades. Over 50,000 rounds of Enfield cartridges were expended during the first day and yet the Maoris would not surrender. Throughout the day they returned our fire with great vigour.

Next day, General Cameron, who had arrived, was so filled with admiration of their valour that he held a parley.

For a few minutes the firing was suspended whilst the natives decided on their reply. Then a chief proudly strode into our camp.

"E woa ma te kuput ennui a te Maori ka whawhei tonu ake ake ake," signifying, "Friends, this is the word of the Maori, they will fight on for ever, for ever, for ever."

The fight was then resumed. The Maoris repulsed attack after attack. They fought as long as their ammunition lasted. When this was gone they bolted with the troops in full pursuit. The chief, Rewi, escaped, but the rest were overtaken, those who escaped the bayonet were driven into a swamp.

Although this defeat virtually broke the back of the rebellion peace was not restored till seven years later. The cost of the war has never transpired. Five millions are admitted to have been spent up to the end of 1863. The probability is that the total cost was double that sum.

(*Next week*: **The War in Abyssinia.**)

LOOK OUT

for our new serial story,

'The Fate of Michael Standridge,'

IT BEGINS THE WEEK AFTER NEXT.

HEADON HILL *IS THE AUTHOR.*

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 1st. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. Robert Allan, of 14 Marylands Road, Maida Vale, W. The winning contribution is marked with a star thus *.

DOCTOR (to new Irish man-servant): "I see you have a glass eye, Pat."

Pat: "Yes, sorr, but it's a rale swindle; the divil a bit can I see wid it at all, at all!"

"ALL you need, professor," said the doctor, cheerfully, "is a tonic in the shape of fresh air."

"What is the shape of fresh air?" asked the doctor's patient.

"YOU should never take anything that doesn't agree with you," the physician told him.

"If I'd always followed that rule, Maria," he remarked to his wife, "where would you be?"

SHE: "Don't you feel a draught over there by that window?"

He (timidly): "Yes, I b-believe I do. Shall I p-pull down the b-blind, or c-come over and sit by you?"

She: "Well, I would advise you to pull down the blind first."

"MISTER," said the small boy to the chemist, "give me a bottle o' them pills you sold father the day before yesterday."

"Are they doing him good?"

"I dunno whether they're doin' father any good or not, but they're doing me good. They jest fit my new air gun!"

"I THINK there should be a law against publishing lies," said the innocent faced man as he laid down his paper and heaved a sigh.

"Have you discovered a lie?" was asked by a fellow passenger.

"I'm sure of it. A man who was on a steamer when she was wrecked claims to have swum a distance of forty miles to land. We know that is a physical impossibility. I myself was once on a steamer lost off the coast, and at that time I was called a champion swimmer. I swam and swam and swam, but I didn't swim no forty miles. I could not have done it."

"How far did you swim?"

"Thirty-nine miles to a foot, sir, and any man in this world who says he has swum forty speaks falsely, sir, and the truth isn't in him, sir!"

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* ON the Cunard wharf at Liverpool an Irishman with curiosity in his eye, was noticed looking long and wonderingly at a monster anchor that was lying on the landing. He was simply on a tour of observation, but his movements were considered very suspicious by the man in charge, who approached the idler, and asked him why he was loafing about there so long.

Said the Irishman, as he pointed to the huge mass of iron:

"Sor, it isn't loafing I am, but if I stay here a week, I'll get a look at the feller that's able to handle that pick."

"THIS seems a very healthy spot, my man," said the tourist to Giles, "I suppose people don't die here very often?"

"No, sir. They only die once!"

CHOLLY: "This is my grandmother's portrait, and I am thought to have some of her features."

His Adored: "Yes, I see a strong resemblance between her eyebrows and your moustache."

MRS. A: "So your daughter is studying for the stage?"

Mrs. B: "Yes, and she is progressing very rapidly."

Mrs. A: "How far has she got?"

Mrs. B: "She has already had her photograph taken as Lady Macbeth."

LADY: "Well, what do you want?"

Tramp: "Last time I was round here you gave me pie what yer said yer cooked yerself, lady."

"Well?"

"Well, I merely called here to know who's goin' to compensate me for the time I wasted in hospital."

AN officer of a Lancashire yeomanry regiment, in an address to his troops, made a stirring allusion to the medals worn by some army veterans in the ranks. One of the volunteers afterwards went home in a very thoughtful frame of mind, and the next morning he came on parade with several medals on his breast. Said the officer:

"I didn't know you had been in the regulars."

"No, I ain't," said the man.

"Well, how about the medals, my good fellow? They can't be yours."

"Can't they?" the man promptly replied; "aye, but they be. My old coo won 'em all at Bootle cattle show."

IF there is one luxury the Yorkshire collier hates to pay extra for, it is his theatre ticket. He will sit through any performance you like to inflict upon him, from a sanguinary war-drama to a neurotic German play, but you touch him on the raw when you charge him more than the usual price for his seat in the gallery.

The cost of a famous tragedian's visit to a West Riding theatre was so great that the prices were raised all round. Unaware of this change, several *habitués* of the gallery tendered the usual sixpence, and were informed by the ticket-seller that the price of admission had been doubled.

"Doubled!" echoed the indignant colliers. "We'll see you swingin' afore we'll pay it. What's the play?"

"*Hamlet*," snapped the ticket-seller. "Stand back and let somebody else come if you don't want to."

The colliers fell back and conferred with one another. Finally, one of them elbowed his way to the box.

"We ain't smitten wi' *Hamlet*, guv'nor, but we don't want to turn back now we've got so far," he awkwardly explained; "make it *The Grip of Iron* or *Drink*, an' we'll dub up the extra tanner!"

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Ethel: "What foolish things a young man will do when he is in love!"

Edith (breathlessly): "Oh, Ethel! Has he proposed?"

"I don't understand you. A few minutes ago you said Medlesome was a great business man, and now you say he doesn't know his own business."

"Exactly; other people's business is his speciality."

Tramp: "Haven't you got something for me to do?"

Farmer: "No, I'm afraid not. There is not much work just now."

Tramp: "I don't want much. You would be surprised to see with how little work I could get along."

"I've got a tongue-tied child, doctor. Can anything be done for it?"

"Boy or girl?"

"Girl."

"Humph! I think you'd better not interfere with the workings of Providence, ma'am."

On one occasion Lord Wolseley's zeal for the welfare of his men got the better of his discretion.

Dinner was being served to the soldiers, and orderlies hurried backward and forward with steaming pails of soup.

Lord Wolseley stopped one of them.

The man was at attention in a moment.

"Remove the lid."

No sooner said than done.

"Let me taste it."

"But, plaze yer——"

"Let me taste it, I say."

And taste it he did.

"Disgraceful! Tastes like nothing in the world but dish water."

"Plaze yer honour," gasped the man, "and so it is."

Proved it to Him.—"Whew!" exclaimed the ordinary man in the tram, turning to his neighbour, "is this hot enough for you?"

The one addressed carefully laid down his paper, removed his glasses, and faced his questioner.

"My friend," he commenced, "in order for us to discuss this subject with any degree of intelligence, we must first understand each other. By 'this,' I suppose you refer to the weather. Yes, sir, this is hot enough for me, and I will prove, my dear sir, why such a thing is possible. The thermometer—at least the one I noticed—registered 115 deg. in the shade. That is something like blood heat, I believe, and, according to physicians, is dangerous. Five or six persons have suffered sunstrokes, I understand, and without the slightest doubt it was hot enough for them. Another thing, I saw you were wiping your brow. That alone would prove that your brow was heated, or else, as is possible, understand, you may be suffering from a cold sweat. However, I believe the perspiration on your brow is caused by heat. Therefore, with five or six sunstrokes within the last hour, the sweat running from your brow, and the thermometer registering 115 degrees in the shade, we have three distinct arguments to prove that it is hot enough for both of us. Have you any arguments to advance to the contrary, sir?"

But the ordinary man had turned his back, not even responding when his friend reached over and pulled him violently by the shoulders.

A scientist says that every healthy boy should be able to drop off to sleep in ten minutes. This does not mean office boys, who are expected to do the same thing in one and three-quarter minutes.

A man was recently charged in court with assault and robbery on the King's highway. Prisoner's counsel, addressing the Bench, said he would produce witnesses to prove that at the time stated in the indictment, the prisoner was in his home nursing his child and soothing it to sleep.

Prisoner: "Yes, my lord, we will prove a lullaby."

"Our cook was going to leave yesterday, but my wife's diplomacy saved the day."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; when the cook gave her notice, my wife, with great presence of mind, said: 'That's too bad, Bridget, but I'm not surprised. Several of the neighbours' girls predicted you wouldn't have any chance with the handsome new policeman who is assigned to this beat.'"

In a provincial court recently Farmer A sought to recover from his neighbour, Farmer B, the value of certain sheep alleged to have been worried by B's dog. For the defence it was contended that the dog which worried the sheep belonged not to B, but to A, and the following dialogue took place:

Counsel for the defendant: "You admit that the defendant's dog and yours were alike?"

Plaintiff: "Yes, they wor as much alike as two peas."

Counsel: "When you saw the dog worrying your sheep, where were you?"

Plaintiff: "About a hundred yards away."

Counsel: "One hundred yards! And you mean to say that at that distance you were near enough to swear the dog was defendant's and not your own?"

Plaintiff: "Yes!"

Counsel: "Wonderful! Now do you mind telling the court what made you so sure on the point?"

Plaintiff: "Not a bit! Ye see, ma dog had been dead two days!"

Verdict for the plaintiff.

Making Her Choice.—"Choose between us!"

Winkleton folded up his evening newspaper and savagely threw it on the floor.

"Yes, madam," he continued, "I tell you once for all that you can't have both of us. The last time that dressmaker was in the house for a week I vowed that I never would stand it again, and I won't. As for being under the same roof with two half-crazy and absorbed women, and requiring a rake every morning to get the odd pieces of cloth out of my clothes; to hear the rattle and whirr of that confounded sewing machine, and to sit at my meals and listen to a lot of cut bias and gros grain, ruffled and flounced, and pleated talk—I've had all I'm ever going to have. If I'm to be turned out of my own house, all right; but you can't have both of us. I leave the day she comes. You'll have to make your decision quick. Come, madam, which shall it be, the dressmaker or me?"

Mrs. Winkleton looked at her husband with a hopeless, half-despairing look, in which were discernible some traces of indignation and a sense of injustice.

"If you must go, dear," she said softly, "why, I have nothing more to say!"

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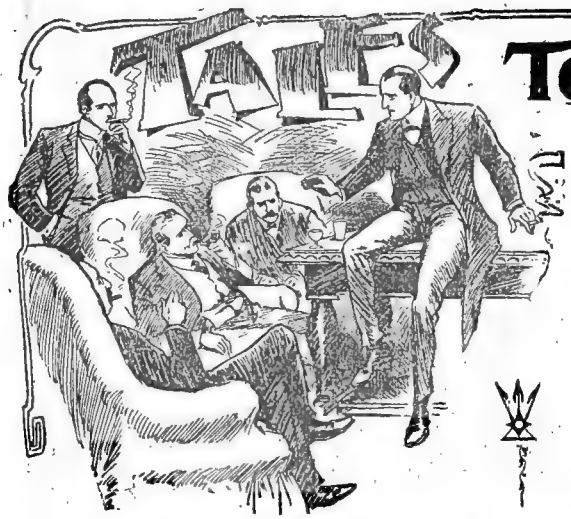

Told "off Duty."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

The Diver's Story.

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY.

"Well," said Martin Cuffe, "I wasn't, as you may say, under orders to anybody, seeing as I had, for the most part at any rate, a private diving business of my own; but for all that, duty's duty all the world over, for it's just doing the right thing in the right way.

"I'm 'off duty' now, thank goodness! for I've had enough of under-water work to last me a lifetime, and though I was—and am, for the matter of that—fond of it—in a way, still, the wear and tear of it 'buckles' a man like, and makes him to be right down glad of the last lazy spell.

"Most of my jobs I did myself, but I had one or two decent fellows as I employed, off and on, to do the easy bits; things, I mean, as didn't want more than the ordinary amount of 'savee' and common-sense.

"They were good enough chaps in their way, but they'd 'a' lost their heads, I'm thinking, in any specially tight fit.

"There's one job in particular I had as just comes to my mind, as I'll never forget—no, not if I lives to be a hundred! Well, fact is, it were my last, for what I got out of it (between ourselves) made it possible for me to put off the 'helmet' for ever.

"It's a story worth hearing—at least, I think so; and if you're the men I take you to be, you'll be of my opinion when I've unreeled it.

"I was sitting by the fire in my little office in the Minories on a cold afternoon in November, '95.

"I'd got a fit of the 'blues.' Not long returned from a rather nasty job near Filey, off the Yorkshire coast, I fancy I'd caught a bit of a chill. Anyway, I felt moody-minded and out of sorts.

"'Gentleman to see you, Mr. Cuffe,' said the old woman (she went by the name of 'the office girl'), who served all the floors in the house.

"'Eh,' said I, rousing myself. 'Gentleman; show him up.'

"Martha, the 'office girl,' returned almost directly, and ushered in a tall, well-dressed, middle-aged man.

"'Mr. Cuffe—Mr. Martin Cuffe?' said he, with a smile that showed a good set of teeth, and peering curiously from under his nearly white pent-house eyebrows.

"'The same, sir,' I replied, rising. 'Will you take a chair,' indicating the only other one in the room.

"'No; I would rather stand.'

"I never allow other people's eccentricities to interfere with my own comforts, so I just sat down again and waited developements.

"'Have you anything special on now, Mr. Cuffe? in a professional sense I mean.'

"'No!' said I, 'nothing, that is of any account. I've a couple of hands at work in the Mersey, but they can get along very well without me.'

"'Ah! then you would be open to undertake a commission?'

"'Depends on what the commission is,' said I.

"I didn't quite like my visitor's looks, and decided in my own mind to be cautious and not too hasty in coming to a conclusion either way with him.

"'It is a deep-sea business,' said the other, with one hand resting on the table.

"'Whereabouts?'

"'A mile or so off the Start.'

"'Anything to come up?'

"'Well!—'m—yes—; there is—something to come up?'

"'And what, if I may ask, may the something be?'

"'A box—just a—a box of papers—only papers!'

"'Just so; only papers. Nothing else?'

"'No, I think not. Much good coin went down, I believe, with the ship; but I am concerned only with the box—a charge of my own—a—er——'

"'Oh! I see!—you, Mr. Aloysius Ponsonby,' said I, reading from the card that he had handed me at the outset. 'You were a passenger on board then?'

"'Yes, I sailed from Table Bay in the *Caradoc* on——'

"'The *Caradoc*!—why, that's the mail steamer that foundered off the Start a month since!'

"'Yes, that is the vessel'

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"'There were but two saved; one passenger, and a seaman.'

"'That is so. I was that passenger.'

"'Dear me! this is very interesting, Mr. Ponsonby,' said I, 'but surely, I cannot act in any way, without the authority of the Mail Company.'

"'Which,' said Mr. Ponsonby, hastily. 'I have here!' with the words producing an imposing-looking document from the breast pocket of his coat.

"'Yes, it is quite regular and satisfactory,' said I, after a glance at the paper, that purported to be the official authorisation of the Mail Co., countersigned by the hand of the Salvage Department of the Board of Trade.

"'Now,' said the other, 'the idea is simply this—that you, with whatever assistance you may require (all of you being sworn to secrecy), shall, from a suitable vessel to be furnished by me and at my expense, descend to the wreck of the *Caradoc*, and search for and bring up to the surface a certain sheet-iron box, eighteen inches square, and upon which is painted in plain white letters —*Croxford Estate. A.P.* For this service you, Martin Cuffe, are to receive the sum of £2,000 sterling.'

"'And supposing,' said I, looking him squarely in the face; 'supposing I fail either to find the box or to bring it to the surface—how then?'

"'In either eventuality you will be paid the sum of £200.'

"It was, in one way, a speculation; and yet, if the box were really there, and get-at-able, it would go hard with me if I could not succeed in both finding and raising it.

"'Look here, sir,' I said at last, when I had for a minute or two mentally studied the pros. and cons., 'look here. guarantee me a minimum bonus of £300 in the event, through no fault of my own, of failure, and I'm your man!'

"The readiness with which he agreed to my terms, ought to have convinced me that matters were not shipshape and quite as they should be; but the temptation of the possible £2,000 was too great and alluring, and so, recklessly throwing my ballast overboard, I resolved to risk it.

"Before leaving my office that afternoon, Ponsonby arranged to visit me the next day, when he was to hand me a banker's draft for £2,000, post-dated a fortnight; I, on my part, undertaking, over my signature, to return same in exchange for current-dated cheque, value £200, upon failure to bring up from the wreck of the *Caradoc* the box in question.

* * * * *

"In the early morning of November 28th, '95, a small, smart screw yacht, with steam up, might have been seen lying off the little coast town of Kingston, in Bigbury Bay, some fifteen miles to the westward of the Start.

"At this hour there was no one on board the *Mermaid*, except myself, my chief assistant, George Pfeil, and the master and crew.

"At 9 a.m. we were to up-anchor and head for the Start. I had full written instructions from Ponsonby, together with a chart showing the exact position, so far as it could be known, of the *Caradoc*. With the help of these I calculated to be able to bring things to a successful issue, though, having regard to some of the former, I quite made up my mind to follow my own instincts and to do the thing, if it were to be done at all in my own way.

"I could not help, somehow, fancying that Ponsonby, in spite of the apparent straightforwardness of that gentleman, was playing a game of some sort; not, perhaps, a fraudulent one (although even that, maybe, was among the possibles), but a game, having for its object prospective advantage to him.

"I could, however, prove nothing; and in the face of official permission to carry out diving operations in connection with the *Caradoc*, I could only continue to *fancy*, and let things pan out as best they would.

"The anchor, at nine o'clock sharp, was hove 'short,' and we were actually under weigh, when one of the hands reported a steam launch as putting out from Kingston Quay, and making for us at top speed.

"There was nothing for it but to heave to, and await events.

I didn't quite like my visitor's looks.

"Cleaving the water in racing fashion, the little boat snorted and panted up to us in a cloud of steam.

"Looking over the side, I saw Ponsonby making his way up the Jacob's ladder hand over fist.

"'Full speed ahead!' he yelled out, the moment his foot touched the deck.

"Truth to say, I thought the man was mad; but as I turned my head to watch the launch depart for the shore, I saw something that let daylight into the puzzle.

"This was nothing less than another boat (a larger one than the first) coming fast in our direction.

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"I could distinctly make out a figure standing in the bows of the on-coming craft, and waving his hand, in evident stimulation of the engineer.

"As they passed the returning launch the man hailed her, though, of course, I could not hear what was said.

"All this while Ponsonby, in excited tones, was frantically urging the master of the *Mermaid* to fresh exertions. The result was that we soon distanced the boat, and in less than a quarter of an hour completely lost sight of her.

"'Now, Cuffe,' said Ponsonby to me, 'in about an hour and a half we shall be on the ground. Are you ready?'

"'Yes,' said I, 'I'm ready; but there was no necessity for you to come with us.'

"'I am the best judge of that!' retorted the other, none too pleasantly. 'This is a very important matter for me, and I wish to be on the spot when the box comes to hand.'

"There was nothing for me to say, whatever my thoughts might be, so I kept my own counsel as a discretionary measure.

"I could not but notice Ponsonby's evident relief as we steamed out of sight of the second boat.

"The process of putting two and two together was becoming with me more and more definite and productive.

"The very uneasiness of the man was suspicious; so much so that I began to think that I was in for a strange bit of business.

"About half-past eleven (in sailor language 'seven bells') the engines, by Ponsonby's order, were stopped, and preparations made, by means of head sails and spanker, to bring the vessel to and keep her so.

"Rapidly I got out all my tackle, fixed it, and was soon in readiness to go over the side.

"The estimated depth of water in which the *Caradoc* lay, was, as near as possible, eleven fathoms; a tidy dive with the 'dress.'

"The very last thing I saw as I looked up through the 'goggles,' before sinking, was Ponsonby, glaring down with an expression, such as I have never seen on any man's face before or since.

"Greed — fierce, wolfish anticipation — literally glowered in his eyes; till I was glad to get beneath the water, out of their baleful influence.

"Upon reaching the bottom I could not at first see anything distinctly; a recent slight squall having disturbed the water and rendered it somewhat muddy. It was settling fast, however, and as it gradually cleared, I could make out that I was standing midway between two vessels, one of far greater bulk than the other.

"It did not take me long to identify the *Caradoc*, although the silting-up of sand and slush and the ships' consequent settlement in the 'bottom' would have made it difficult for a novice.

"I tested the tubes and cords to make sure of their being clear and workable, and then proceeded to board the wreck through a large gap in the port bulwarks; the ship lying absolutely on her port beam ends.

"According to my instructions I should find the box in the third mid-ship cabin on the starboard side.

"The chief thing to guard against was the fouling of the air-tubes and life-lines in the descent of the main stairway leading to the first-class berths.

"I safely accomplished it, however, and groped my way to the third starboard cabin. The door was, of course, torn off; and it might be, I thought, that the box had been washed out into some hole and corner of the cabin corridor.

"It was while I was deliberating as to whether I should confine my search to the cabin itself, or whether I should make a general examination of its immediate neighbourhood, that I felt—as I am a living man!—the apparently caressing touch of human fingers on the back of my own left hand!

"I could see nothing;—I could only feel that something was uncannily near to me.

"Summoning up all my courage (I am not by nature a coward), I reached out, and touched, what I knew from experience to be the dead body of a human being. So far as I could make out, it was jammed in a sitting posture (between a bulkhead and the framework of the corridor), on some slight elevation.

"Slowly lowering my hand, it came in contact with a square object, which it at once flashed upon me, must be—the box.

"To make sure, I uncovered, and directed upon it, the little submarine lamp I carried; and there, gleaming ghostly white, beneath the depressed index finger of the dead man's hand was the inscription:

"'*Croxford Estate. A. P.*'

"By some misadventure my lamp went suddenly out, at once after I had read the legend on the box. I had, therefore, no time in which to examine the body sitting upon it.

"To raise it, I must displace its ghastly custodian. Before doing this I decided to go to the surface and report my partial success; and obtain a couple of small steel hand-bars, necessary to remove the box out of the wreck.

"Jerking the signal cord, I was soon mounting the side of the *Mermaid*.

"'Where is it? Where is it?' cried Ponsonby excitedly.

"Then I told him.

"Sakes! how that man did swear! and all because I had not at once sent up the box.

"'Quick! Quick! get you down!' he shouted.

"'There's no such hurry,' I said, quietly.

"'No hurry! There is! get you down, I say!'

"The master, who was helping me to tighten my straps, here nudged me, and pointed to the eastward. My helmet being off, I could see distinctly the smoke of a small steam-vessel approaching from that direction.

"Ponsonby saw that I had noticed it, and seemed almost beside himself with ungovernable rage.

"'If you don't get down within two minutes,' he screamed, 'I'll throw you over the side!'

"'Steady! steady!' I said. 'Two can play at that game. What yours may be I can't exactly say, but I'm prepared to make a good guess.

"'Oh, I'm going down—now' (as he made a rush at me, Smithson, the master, interposing to prevent mischief), 'but I won't guarantee that the box comes up before the arrival of that boat,' and I pointed meaningly to the little speck int he far distance.

"He was furious and purple with passion, but with one glance at him through my 'windows,' I sank out of sight.

"Now comes the most remarkable part of my story, so far, at least, as it personally concerns me.

"I descended to about the same spot, making allowance for the slight drifting of the *Mermaid*; but curiously, as I now think, my attention was irresistibly

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attracted, not by the hull of the *Caradoc*, but by the strangely quaint object on the other side of me.

"Its form (as much of it, anyway, as I could well see, for it was nearly embedded in sand, and covered with weed, and the lower marine crustacea), was certainly that of one of the craft of the Carolian period. The high, built up, carved stern, was really all that was visible, the name, as I flashed my lamp upon it, standing plainly out in raised, faded gold letters, *The Royal Cenotheri*.

"Immediately under the port quarter, just over where the rudder-post was broken short off, was a large, jagged hole (made, probably, by encounter with a rock), on the sand below it, being a number of rude, rusty-looking, barrel-shaped objects.

It was jammed in a sitting posture.

"I touched one of these rather smartly with a steel bar. It fell to pieces on the instant at my feet, scattering into a thousand small fragments.

"I stooped and picked up one of them.

"It was nearly circular, and of a peculiar colour and size.

"Scraping it carefully to remove the dirt and incrustation that obliterated it, presently the head of a man appeared on the one side of it.

"*Then I knew!*

"I had accidentally happened upon one of old Phipp's failures!

"Phipps was an enterprising inventor and what not in King Charles II.'s time. He made several periodical efforts to raise the money lost by the foundering of two or three treasure ships, but always without success.

"It had been reserved for me to make the discovery, and, all being well, to reap the harvest.

"The water, even at the bottom, was now so calm and clear that I had no difficulty, with the aid of my lamp, in gauging the extent of my find.

"Ponsonby and his box were now a secondary consideration with me.

"Still, as that worthy might, if I delayed too long, be nasty, and work me an injury from above, I had to devise a course of action which should at once blind him and secure to myself my new-found wealth.

"Signalling again, I rose to the surface, expecting, of course, a torrent of ugly words and menaces.

"Guess my astonishment, then, when I saw, as I topped the Jacob's ladder, Ponsonby in the act of disappearing in a flying leap over the opposite side of the *Mermaid* to that where I stood.

"The reason was speedily patent.

"The little steam craft was made fast alongside, while on our deck were standing two gentlemen in earnest conversation with Captain Smithson.

"Briefly, the situation was this.

"Ponsonby, or rather Edward Dighton, a cousin of the actual owner of the box, had fraudulently attempted to obtain possession of it. He had never been a passenger by the *Caradoc*; the real Aloysius Ponsonby, eldest son of the late Sir Charles Ponsonby, Bart. of Croxford Court, Derbyshire, having been on his way home to England (the precious box in his custody) in the ill-fated vessel.

"How the swindling rascal hoped to benefit by the papers in young Ponsonby's possession, it's impossible to say, there being two other sons of the old baronet living.

"Undoubtedly the body I had seen in the *Caradoc's* cabin was that of the true and lawful Aloysius Ponsonby, who, poor chap! even in death laid claim to that which was his by heritable right.

"Why the Croxford family papers should have travelled to Africa at all was a mystery, and is likely to remain one.

"Edward Dighton's body was never found. It was in a fit of desperate disappointment and mad frenzy that he had thrown his life away. He could not face the searching challenge of Mr. Carle, the Ponsonby's family solicitor, who, with the manager of the Mail Company had got on the track of his scheme, arriving just in time to frustrate it.

"The gold? Oh, yes! I got it up, but how—well, I had better not, perhaps, say.

"I don't want to provoke, even now, awkward official questions, though I quite believe that, as the discoverer of the treasure-trove, I was fairly entitled to the enjoyment of it.

"I, of course, had no objection to carry out my original contract with the pseudo Ponsonby, and to send up the box for delivery into the hands of its rightful owners.

"It will always be a puzzle to me how Dighton got the authorization of the Mail Company and the counter-signature of the Board of Trade salvage man.

"It was on a proper printed form, and though, of course, forged, got up in such style as to deceive even officialism itself."

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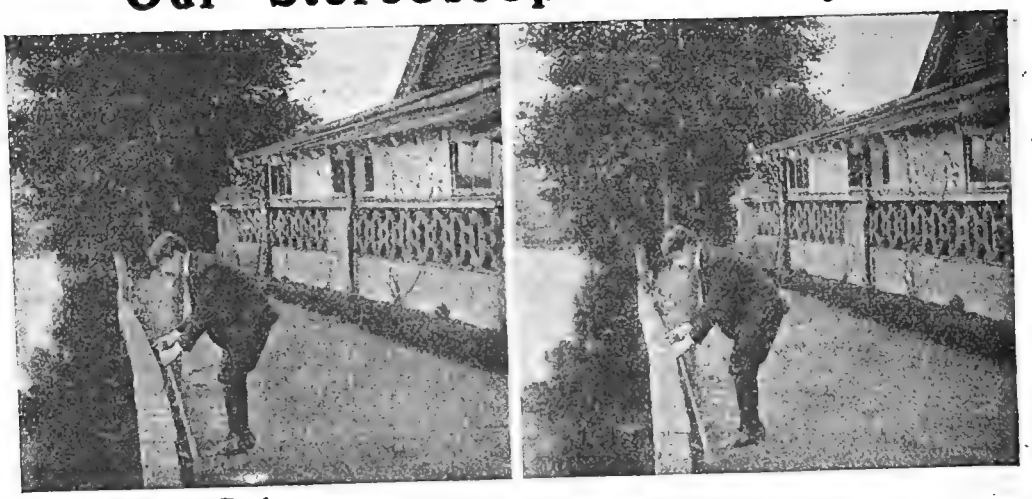
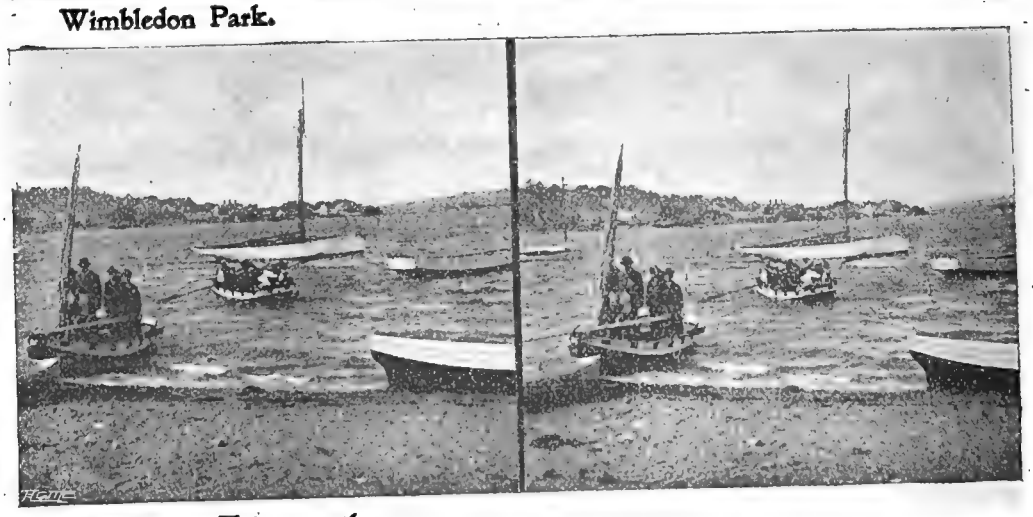
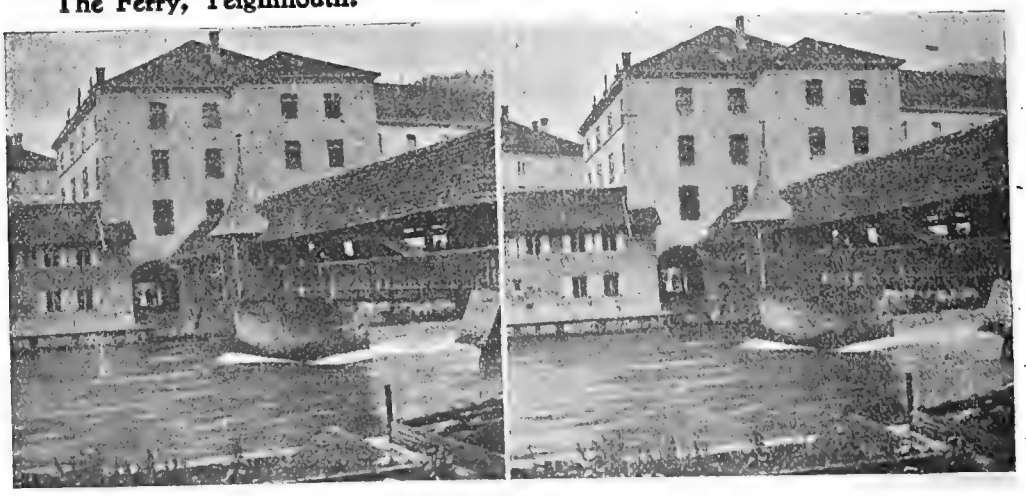
Our Stereoscopic Gallery.



Wimbledon Park.



The Ferry, Teignmouth.



Lucerne.

To be cut out and looked at through a stereoscope, which can be supplied by *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 2s., post free.

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The Eaton Square Elopement.

I.

"You," said Mostyn, "are the man to do it."

"If you said that I am most emphatically the man who is not going to do it," I returned, reaching for another cigarette, "you would be nearer the mark."

"But you *must* do it," cried my friend, pushing his fingers through his yellow hair in a manner expressive of a quarrel with the world.

"But, you ass, I've never seen the girl!" I cried.

"All the better," grunted Mostyn, laconically; and I sought in the Teofanis relief from his absurdities. As I glanced round his scantily-furnished chambers, and thought of the luxurious home in Eaton Square which he proposed to rob of its dearest treasure, I laughed aloud. My friends say I have a musical laugh.

"Solomon has remarked that the laughter of some people," meditated Mostyn, "is like the crackling of thorns under a pot." Then he swallowed his whisky at a gulp and contemplated the ceiling.

"Can't you see how absurd you are?" I asked him. "Look here. You are a barrister, with not too many briefs and no capital."

"My capital," interrupted Mostyn, "is youth, energy, ambition, I may say, brains."

"What dividend does it pay?" I asked; and, dodging "Chitty on Contracts," went on with my exordium: "You want to marry Miss Cecilia Grimshaw, a very charming young lady, I've no doubt, but the sole heiress of Sir George Grimshaw, the millionaire ship-owner, and therefore no wife for a pauper like you. Am I right? Is it not absurd?"

"You're a grovelling worm," said Mostyn, "you're a soulless money-grub. Look here—I tell you it's all arranged. Cissie will be ready at nine-thirty. They dine at eight, then Lady Grimshaw, having absorbed a good deal of curaçoa, sleeps in the drawing-room, while Sir George retires to his study; and there, he, too, slumbers melodiously. Cissie's kit is all packed; she will be ready at the area-gate at nine-thirty. You meet her there, pop her into a cab, and meet me at Victoria in time for the 9.40. After which, Dover, Paris and happiness!"

"Why don't you meet her yourself?" I demanded, with some heat. "She's not my girl. I'm not going about carrying off people's girls for them!"

Mostyn banged his fist on the table, and made the glasses rock.

"Why, you blithering idiot!" he cried, "I'm as well known about the vicinity of their house as the bobby on the beat. I should be spotted in one act. All the servants are devoted to the old man, and a kitchenmaid going out to post a letter might see me loafing about, and then all would be up. No, you must go, old chap, and bring her to me. It's the only way."

I was touched, in spite of myself, by the lad's earnestness and sincerity. It was very wrong of me to aid and abet him, for I was five years his senior, and had administered to him at school that amount of mild bullying without which the British fag is not worth his salt. Yet, on the impulse of the moment, I signified my assent to the mad-headed enterprise he proposed.

"Good man!" was his only comment, as he shoved the decanter across the table to me.

There was a few moments' pause, while we both smoked meditatively, I already repenting of my rash promise. On the other hand, I argued to myself that these two foolish young people were not to be turned from the flight—the special license was ready, the fares booked. This thing had got to happen, and I might just as well be in it, and see that Freddie Mostyn got into no serious trouble, as not.

"Begad, Phil, do you realise that this is my last bachelor night on earth?" cried Mostyn, waking up suddenly. "We'll dine, my boy, and you shall wish me luck."

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A nimble hansom was soon rapidly speeding us towards Oxford Street. The bells on the harness jingled merrily as we went, and ere we had pulled up at Frascati's, Freddie had let me into a secret which removed the last of my scruples as to the elopement.

"Now, old Sobersides," cried he, merrily, as we sped along, "I'll tell you something. I'm not quite the penniless pauper you suppose. The old girl has come round, she's seen Cissie and fallen in love with her at once. I've got her blessing and some of the very best to be going on with, and she's promised to see us straight with Papa Grimshaw. What do you say to that?"

"It is an omen!" cried Freddie.

I regret to say that by the flippant title of "the old girl," Mostyn referred to the Lady Frederica Steynes, a stately dame of the old school, and his god-mother. She was a widow, and fabulously rich; Freddie had been her idol and sole heir till some youthful escapade had disgraced and disinherited him. So I was genuinely pleased at his news.

Then a thought struck me.

"But," I said, "this removes all necessity for the elopement, so far as I can see. Papa Grimshaw would give his ears for you as a son-in-law now you are back in favour with your aristocratic pals."

"You have no imagination," said Mostyn with a sad smile. "Having courted old Grimshaw's daughter as a pauper, I'll marry her as one. Even Cissie doesn't know of the good news yet. Though I don't want any test of her fidelity—dear little girl! Then, we'll go back to Papa, and make him feel bad in his inside. The dear old thing smashes things when he's put out. So far, my attentions to Cissie have cost three chairs, a Chinese god, and a lot of miscellaneous china. Oh, yes, and the case of butterflies in the library—I forgot that. When he gets Cissie's note, I tremble for the drawing-room suite."

He was in the wildest spirits, and rattled on all through dinner.

We had not long taken our seats when the band crashed out the opening chords of the Wedding March from "Lohengrin."

"It's an omen!" cried Freddie, raising his glass. "To Cissie!"

And he drank to the future Mrs. Mostyn with great enthusiasm.

II.

Feeling more like one of those felons whom my eloquence has sometimes restored to their friends and their relations than a respectable barrister with a fair practice, I at the time appointed loitered along the area railings of Sir George Grimshaw's house, on the look out for the new edition of the runaway girl. I had put on a bowler, and a dark overcoat, and the piercing cold of the night justified me in turning up my collar, so that my face was almost concealed. I do not know why I took the trouble thus to disguise myself, save that I had a vague idea that I was a character in a detective novel, and must behave accordingly.

The cold moon rode high in the heavens and every twig, almost, in the Square gardens showed up with startling distinction. No worse night for an evasion such as that contemplated by the daughter of the house of Grimshaw, could be imagined.

A glimmer of light caught my eye. The policeman was flashing his lantern on the doors as he went past. With a sudden panic at which I as I write feel a burning twinge of shame, I started to dive across the road, with the intention of shrinking into the shadow of the gardens. Then the absurdity of such a course struck me just in time, and, walking past the policeman as he tried a door with his ponderous hand, I called cheerily, "Good-night, constable."

"Good-night, sir," he answered perfunctorily; and gradually his footsteps died away.

I returned to my post.

The drawing-room windows were blazing with light; behind them, doubtless, Lady Grimshaw was slumbering peacefully. And surely—yes—a thin, cloaked figure was standing at the area-gate, peering timidly up and down the silent Square.

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I was at the girl's side in an instant.

"You have come to take me to him," she breathed, rather than said, looking into my face.

"I am from—you know who," I answered in the same mysterious whisper. I was beginning to enjoy myself hugely.

"Let us be quick," whispered the girl.

Master Jules turned and dashed for the entrance.

We walked a little way down the square, so that the household should not hear the hansom draw up at the door, and I soon put my fair charge into a swift cab. So closely was she veiled that I could not see anything of her face, but I had heard Freddie's enthusiastic description, and longed for a peep at the features of his lady-love. The neat figure in its trim, tailor-made gown, and the smallness and whiteness of the ungloved hand which had rested for a moment on my arm stimulated my curiosity still more.

Only one sentence did the girl speak, during the short drive from the Square to Victoria.

"I have got—it—safe," she murmured.

I now knew what Freddie meant when he said that the special license was "in good hands," though I rather wondered at his giving it to his bride for safety.

So eager was the girl that she sprang from the cab almost before it had stopped. I hastened after her as soon as I had discharged a certain necessary formality with the cabby, and stood petrified with astonishment at the sight which met my gaze.

The girl was talking earnestly to a big, burly, swarthy foreigner—a Belgian by his appearance and accent—while afar off, Freddie surveyed the scene with a languid indifference. I advanced towards the girl. Her foreign companion looked up and saw me. He went livid, and turned on the girl with the snarl of a trapped wolf.

"She-devil!" he hissed, with a round Flemish oath or two. "You have betrayed me! It is the police!"

"Jules!" cried the girl, clinging to him.

Then the brute raised his brawny fist, and struck her full between her eyes.

She dropped like a stone, while Master Jules turned and dashed for the entrance, with a score of angry people in pursuit. An active station-detective dexterously tripped him, and he was promptly secured.

I turned to the girl. She was in good hands, and restoratives were being administered. But a strange thing had happened. As she fell, a box carried beneath her cloak had burst open, and a stream of glittering baubles—rings, brooches, and what not—rolled on to the dusty planks of the platform.

A hand shook me roughly by the shoulder. It belonged to Freddie Mostyn.

"Where's Cissie?" demanded that excited young man.

Too astonished to speak, I mutely pointed to the still insensible victim of the Belgian's violence.

"That isn't Cissie, you thundering idiot?" roared Freddie, scarlet with rage, "that's Ada, her maid, right enough, but where's she? Why—you—you—I don't know what to call you—you've run away with the wrong girl!"

* * * * *

Poor Ada! She was more sinned against than sinning; and at the subsequent trial a tender hearted jury acquitted her, while the Belgian got a smart sentence of penal servitude.

We afterwards learnt that with the cunning of her tribe, she had found out the scheme for the intended elopement, and thought it would be an excellent opportunity to carry out her long-cherished plan of bolting to the Continent with her scoundrelly foreign lover and as many of the jewels belonging to Lady and Miss Grimshaw as she could lay her hands on. I was the innocent cause of the frustration of her little scheme.

Every well-regulated girl will be pleased to hear that after this regrettable contretemps Cissie Grimshaw was married in church in the orthodox fashion, at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, and that the presents numbered over two hundred and fifty. The drawing-room suite in the Grimshaw house is still intact, and Sir George often refers to "my son-in-law, Sir Frederick Mostyn—the eminent K.C., you know."

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HOW SARSEVILLE ELECTED PARSON SOULE.

HISTORIC incidents are rare in the case of new townships. Sarseville, however, prides itself to-day upon being one of the few notable exceptions to the general rule of prevailing dullness and monotonous existence.

Sarseville is almost infantile in its newness. It certainly possesses within itself all the elements of future greatness and prosperity, in that it can and does boast of the usual urban institutions; *viz*: a bank; a town-hall; an opera-house, (not yet roofed in; or, as some say, visible above foundation line); several temples of refreshment for man and beast, (the terms being interchangeable, as per circumstance); and last, but not by any means least, a church—or rather *the* church.

Now, Sarseville nominally supports its one ecclesiastical organisation.

Every citizen is proud of it. The church, as a church, is so obviously a genuine guarantee to the outside world of their own moral and spiritual good condition; while the municipal officials being, all of them, church office-holders also, it naturally follows that local government, as understood in such young communities as Sarseville, is not only conducted irreproachably, and with the smallest amount possible of party strife, but is undeniably "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever."

On a certain evening in the late spring of this present year of grace, a young man, as attractive of form as of feature, was leaning lazily upon the palings that bordered in from the road, a small neatly-kept patch of garden ground, in the front of a pretty little shingle-roofed, weather-boarded frame house.

Asher B. Barte, road surveyor, mining engineer and general scientific expert, arrived but yesterday from Carthage City, over twenty miles away, the nearest available railroad point for Sarseville.

His presence here is in this connection: his mission, being, indeed, to preliminarise for a short loop line, that shall bring the lately-born township into close, and complete transit-touch with the rest of civilization.

He is staying at Deacon Entwhistle's, having brought with him a letter of introduction to that worthy from a mutual friend in New York.

Hardly had he set foot in the Deacon's dwelling, than he is conscious of some social, or domestic upheaval; something out of the ordinary going on.

There is a vacancy in the pulpit and pastorate of "Shiloh."

The late incumbent, dead nearly a month now, had, it seems, left behind him in Sarseville, an exceptionally large legacy of unrest and contention. He had not been, by any means, a "strong" man; but tact, a pleasing way with the women-folk, and a genial, conciliatory spirit as toward all men, had made him popular, except, perhaps, with the few who looked for something more stimulating than "milk" where their spiritual fare was concerned.

In the Deacon's house the deceased had been, when in life, a true *persona grata*; but to a great extent the excitement consequent upon the election of his successor has made his memory to be buried with his body.

The electors, (the vestral body of "Shiloh") are divided into two hostile camps.

The one, section advocate, with no uncertain sound of speech, and with much expenditure of printer's ink the claims of the Reverend Holofernes Brown, a minister at present out of commission, and resident at Carthage City.

Resident, that is to say, usually; the candidate being as a matter of fact, at this particular moment in Sarseville; on the spot as it were, to watch his own interests in the contest.

The other is in favour of an, as yet, unseen, although not altogether unknown individual, hailing from a little village, nestled away among the slopes and valleys of the distant "Catskills."

Deacon Soule, the proud father of the Reverend Caleb, is, naturally, the head and front; the life and heart of his son's cause; and the advent of young Asher Barte finds the struggle in full swing; each side doing its level best, and straining its resources to the utmost in its efforts to win a glorious and enduring victory.

While this explanation has been a'making, the young man has not been idle.

We left him in silent contemplation of the front garden of Arsinoe Smith's house, and we find him now in animated converse with a girl of about his own age, the Arsinoe aforesaid.

They appear to be on fairly intimate terms.

"And Caleb is coming to-night?" she says.

"Yes," replies Asher, "When I saw him three days ago, he told me that he should be here, at the latest, to-night, about this time."

"I am so glad!" she said eagerly, and yet quite unaffectedly, Her companion can see, however, by the faint face-flush, that her pulse quickens, as at the bidding of some maidenly emotion of more than everyday depth and intensity.

Asher Barte and Caleb Soule are so closely allied in the bonds of friendship that the former knows all about his chum's love for Arsinoe.

Two summers before it was, amid the sweet-scented pines that girdled their then respective homes, on the banks of Ohio, that they, mere boy and girl, plighted a troth that nothing short of death itself would ever dissolve.

When Arsinoe left her father's homestead to take up the duties of schoolmistress at Sarseville, Caleb was just about to start his ministerial career at Claverack.

Although letters had passed regularly between the pair, they had not once met since the parting at Woodside Ferry eighteen months ago.

It seemed, therefore, as if this visit of Asher Barte's to Sarseville was a rare opportunity not alone to let Arsinoe know the news of his near coming, but by the lips of his friend, to communicate such little thoughts and messages as could not well be prosaically written down.

Apart from the fact that Asher is an engaged man; happy in the possession of a good girl's love, Caleb knows his friend only too well, to doubt for a moment his trustworthiness as a messenger.

Arsinoe, on her own side the palings, looking the picture of content and loving anticipation, is evidently of the same opinion with regard to Asher Barte's good faith. Her estimate of Caleb's friend would do credit to Caleb himself.

Soon they fall to talking upon the one all-absorbing theme, that is agitating Sarseville throughout its length and breadth.

"I heard a strange rumour," says Asher, "on my way here from the Deacon's; nothing less than, in view of a possible difficulty in coming to an early decision on the question of the choice of candidates, that the matter should be settled by a game of poker, to be played by the appointed representatives of the two parties. It seems that a certain individual—

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known, I believe, in the neighbourhood as Deathery Dick—is responsible for the idea, and has succeeded in 'persuading' several members of either side. Of course it's scandalous, irreverent, in wretchedly bad taste, but what are you to do? Church 'office' doesn't necessarily imply church 'spirit.' I'm far from being a saint, I know, and I'm not a Sarseville citizen, but the first chance I have of getting a word in, I'll give the card-playing vestry gents my humble opinion on the subject, and it certainly won't be complimentary."

"Mr. Barte," said Arsinoe, gravely (she is a tall, upright girl, with a type of face upon which gravity sits well), "for Caleb's sake don't say or do anything until he comes. I feel sure that when he hears of this miserable method of conducting the election, he will protest vigorously. Caleb can be righteously angry, I know; and this is a case when a good man's wrath is not only justifiable, but even called for."

"Well, if Caleb doesn't come soon he'll be too late to stop 'em—for I understood that the thing was to be done this evening at old George Martin's."

"It can't be helped," says Arsinoe, "still, I do wish Caleb were here—right now."

"You've got your wish, Miss Arsinoe," Asher says, suddenly moving away from the fence, out into the road, looking down the latter toward an on-coming single-horse wagon, in which are two men, one of whom is energetically waving his hat to the pair awaiting him.

Caleb Soule, although a small man, and in direct physical contrast to his intended wife, has about him a dignity all his own.

Asher leaves his two friends to their confidences appointing to meet Caleb at his father's later on.

Arsinoe has been so long without a sight of her sweetheart, that she may be pardoned if she allows their own private concerns to take precedence of every other subject.

At last, however, she tells him; and what he thinks, and how he proposes acting only confirms her prophecy to Asher of what he would certainly feel and do.

"I'll go after Asher at once dear," he says, pausing a minute to think, "I'll find out exactly how the thing stands, and then—well—then, I'll have just one word with the electors; and accordingly as they listen to, or disregard what I have to say, so will be my course. I'm quite clear as to what is right in the matter; and if the vestry can't see it from my standpoint—why—there'll be a candidate the less, that's all."

A quarter of an hour later, Caleb Soule and his friend knock at the door of George Martin's house.

It is opened by old George himself, who, far from manifesting confusion, or a guilty consciousness of wrong-doing, beamed broadly and confidently upon the young men.

"Come in, Mr. Soule! Come in, passon! Ye're just in time. Oh, yes, for sure, yer friend's welcome. Come in, sir!"

Answering not a word, the two visitors follow the master of the house along a passage which terminates in a large, square, comfortably furnished parlour.

At the table sit eleven men, members all of them of "Shiloh" vestry. Old Martin's momentarily vacated chair completes the circle.

Two other persons sit chatting in undertones in a shadowy corner of the room, but no one, including the new-comers, appear to notice them, they are the Reverend Holofernes, and Deathery Dick, somewhat of an unholy combination, certainly, but what will you? Light and darkness do sometimes assimilate; and light is not always of even the average illuminating power.

There is Deacon Entwhistle, Deacon Brent, Sam Maynard, and three others, to represent the "Brown" faction, while the party in favour of Caleb Soule is championed by Deacon Smallway, Deacon Josh. Mearns, and a following of four active Church members.

On the table lies a scattered pack of cards, and a large basin, serving as a pool, quite respectably, (or disreputably?) filled with silver and paper money.

Caleb leaves his friend's side, after a keen inspection of everything and everybody, and smartly advances well within the circle of brilliant white light given out by a large hanging lamp, crowned with an enormous shade.

Before he can speak, Deacon Smallway rises heavily, (he is a big, gross, unwieldy man) and addresses him.

"Mr. Soule," he says, with just a suspicion of nervousness in his manner, "It is my pleasing duty as Senior Deacon of 'Shiloh' and also in my capacity of Chief Magistrate of Sarseville to announce to you your due Election to the Pastorship of this Congregation; and to invest you with all the rights, and ——"

"Hold, sir!" cried Caleb; his spare little figure drawn up to its full height; his eyes ablaze with indignation yet his voice quite stern and steady. "Hold, I say! I require answers to two questions of mine before another word is spoken upon the subject of the result of your so-called election of me to be your Pastor. First then, how did you arrive at your decision? Secondly, what is the meaning of these cards, and this bowl of money?"

Not a man speaks in reply; but the whole company of detected gamblers rise as one almost and endeavour, each on his own account, to shuffle towards the door.

Caleb bars the way.

"You shall go," he says, "when I have done, or rather I will myself leave you to continue your game. You have this day disgraced the church in this place. To expect that I should accept an election brought about by such means, and by such hands, is an insult alike to me and to Him whom I humbly seek to serve. I repudiate your choice of me! I will none of it! and will return whence I came, praying only that you may come to a better mind each and every one of you, and render yourselves worthier in the future to fill the offices to which you have been severally called."

They fell away from him, shamefaced, cowed and silent, as he turned the handle of the door, and passed with his friend, out into the night.

* * * * *

There is reason to believe that a better state of things prevails to-day in Sarseville.

For a few months Holofernes Brown, as sole residuary candidate, officiated as minister of "Shiloh," but new men, new manners came in, and when a complete sweep was eventually made of the old vestry, that body's spiritual nominee was incontinently included in the notice to quit.

But Caleb Soule did not return to Sarseville on the improvement of matters.

Remaining with his old congregation, who were only too glad to have him back amongst them a brief while, he lately has been offered and has accepted the pastorate of a prosperous church in the Empire City.

Both he and Arsinoe, his wife, are happy in their own quiet way, he because he know his duty and does it; and she—well—because she knows him to be always right, and rejoices exceedingly in the knowledge.

Ralph Enderby.

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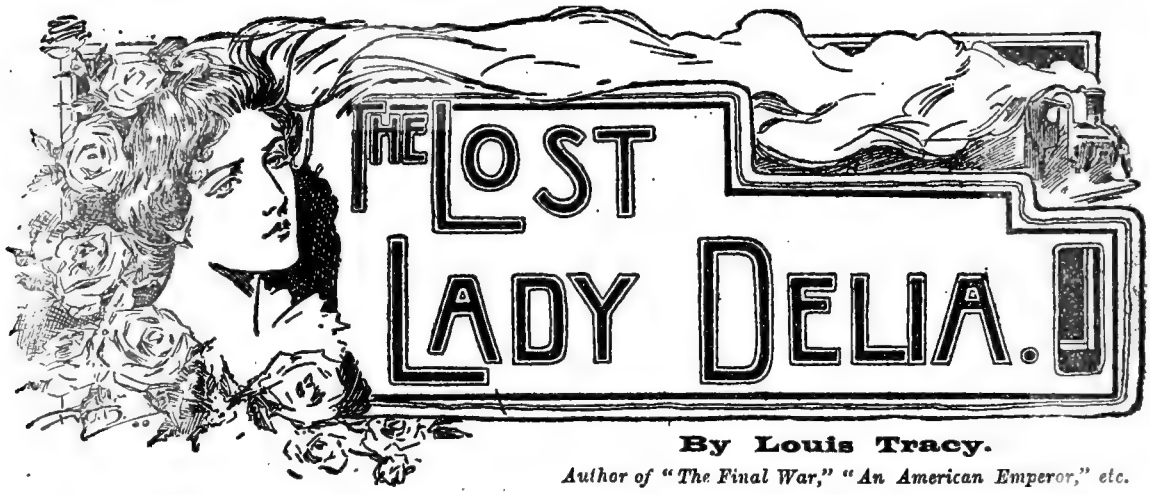

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX. (*continued*).

My father's succession to the title and estates changed all that. We quitted Surrey for Yorkshire, and Wensley House, Portman Square, was a step upwards from the barrack-like building which so admirably suited Mr. Childe's requirements.

When I was at Sandhurst General Mensmore got into difficulties. He quitted Surrey, and we gradually lost sight of him and his children. Afterwards I knew that he struggled on for a few years, placed his son in the Army, and then came a complete collapse, ending in his death and the boy's resignation of his commission. Of Gwendoline Mensmore's whereabouts I knew nothing. Her memory never quitted me, but the new interests in my life dulled it. I imagined that I could laugh at a childish infatuation.

Then I married. I did so in obedience to my father's wishes, and Lady Delia was, I suppose, an ideal wife—far too ideal for a youngster of my lower intellectual plane. I now know that I never had any real affection for her. I was always somewhat awed by her loftier aspirations. My interests lay in racing, hunting, sports generally, and having what I defined as "a good time." She, though an excellent horsewoman, and in every sense an admirable hostess, thought Newmarket vulgar, treated Ascot as a social necessity, and turned up her eyebrows at me when I failed to see any utility in schemes for the reclamation of the submerged tenth.

Thus, though we never quarrelled, we gradually drifted apart. She knew she bored me if she asked me to inspect a model dwelling; I knew she hated the people who were the companions of a coaching tour or a week at Goodwood. Unfortunately, we were not blessed with offspring. Had it been otherwise, we might have found a common object of interest in our children.

Insensibly we agreed to a separate existence. We lived together as friends rather than as husband and wife. We parted without regret and met without cordiality. Do not think we were unhappy. If our marriage was not bliss, it was at least comfortable. I think my wife was proud of my successes on the turf in a quiet kind of way, and I certainly was proud of her and of the high reputation she enjoyed amongst all classes of society. I even reverenced her for it, and I well knew that the enthusiastic receptions given to us by our Yorkshire tenantry were not due to my efforts in their behalf, but to hers.

So we lived for nearly six years, and so we might have continued for sixty had I not met Gwendoline Mensmore again, under vastly changed circumstances. She was a chorus-girl in a variety theatre, earning a poor living under wretched conditions. I discovered the fact by mere chance. I met her, and she told me her story—how she had married a man named Hilmer, whom her father had trusted, and whom she believed to be able to save them from ruin. Then the crash came. Her father died; her husband, also broken down financially, took to drink and ill-treated her; her brother was swallowed up somewhere in the Far West. She had no alternative but to live apart from her husband and try to support herself by the first career that suggests itself to a young, talented, and beautiful woman. But she was already tired of the stage and its distasteful surroundings. Her nature was too delicate for the rude friendships of the dressing-room. She shuddered at the thought of a mild carousal in a bar when the labours of the night were ended.

In a word, were I differently constituted, were she cast in more common mould, there was apparently ready to hand all the material for a vulgar *liaison*.

My respect for my wife, however, no less than Mrs. Hilmer's fine disposition, saved both of us from folly. Yet I could not leave her exposed to the exigencies of a life in which she was rapidly becoming disillusioned. Away in the depths of my heart I knew that this sweet woman was my true mate, separated from me by adverse chance. There was nothing unfair to Delia in the thought. Were she questioned at any time, I suppose, she must have admitted that we were, in some respects, as ill-matched a couple as we were well-matched in others. You will say that I understood but little of feminine nature—nothing at all of my wife's.

How best to help Mrs. Hilmer—that was the question. It was at this stage I made the initial mistake to which I can, too late, trace a host of succeeding misfortunes. I did not consult my wife. Trying now to analyse my reasons for this lamentable error of judgment I imagined that it arose from some absurd disinclination on my part to admit that I went to the stage-door of a theatre to inquire about the identity of a young woman whom I had recognised from the front of the house.

Don't you see, my dear Brett, it is almost as bad to fear your wife as to suspect her.

As, at that time, my own life was free from the slightest cloud of sorrow, I took a keen interest in the troubles of Mrs. Hilmer, and I amused myself by playing, in her behalf, the part of a modern magician. As I felt intuitively that she would resent any direct attempt on my part to place funds at her disposal, I found a great deal of harmless fun in helping her with her consent but without her actual knowledge.

I am, as you know, a rich man. At this hour I cannot

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tell you my available assets to within £100,000. Altogether I must be worth nearly a million sterling—yet my money cannot purchase me another day's existence such as I would tolerate. Strange, is it not?

Well, the close of the year before last was a period of unexampled activity on the Stock Exchange, and, by way of a joke, I made some purchases on Mrs. Hilmer's account, with the intention of pretending to pay myself out of the profits, whilst handing her such balances as might accrue. She is a shrewd woman, and quick at figures, so I might have experienced some difficulty in deceiving her. But the mad record of the past twelve months was in no wise belied by its inception. My purchases were those of a man inspired by the Goddess of Fortune. Stocks that I bought commenced suddenly to inflate. I astounded my brokers by the manner in which I ferreted out neglected bonds, mines which struck the mother lode next week, railway companies whose directors were even then secretly conspiring to water the stock.

Mrs. Hilmer became infected with the craze like myself. Twice we plunged heavily in American Rails and came out triumphantly. To end this part of my story, after five months of excitement I had contrived not only to swell my own deposits to a large extent but I had secured on Mrs. Hilmer's account a sufficient quantity of reliable stock to her in an average income of £1,500 per annum.

My greatest difficulty was to get Mrs. Hilmer to break off from the habit of speculation once she had contracted it. I found that she perused the City prices in the late editions of the evening papers with the same eagerness that a bookmaker looks for the starting prices of the day's races. By the exercise of firmness and tact I was able to stop her from further dealings.

At the close of this period I need hardly say that two things had happened. Mrs. Hilmer and I were fast friends, with common objects and interests in life; and, concurrently, the ties between Delia and myself had loosened still more.

I had also carelessly made another blunder. Under the pretence that secrecy was requisite for Stock Exchange transactions, I had persuaded Mrs. Hilmer to allow me to pass under the name of Colonel Montgomery.

Mrs. Hilmer, of course, was now able to live in comparative luxury. I came to regard her house as an abode of rest. I was more at home in her drawing-room than in my own house. She often spoke to me of my wife, and obviously wished to know her, but here I did a cowardly thing. I represented my married existence as far less comfortable than it really was, and gradually Mrs. Hilmer ceased all allusion to Delia. She misunderstood our relations. I knew it, and did not explain. Not a very worthy proceeding for a man whose sense of honour is so keen that he prefers death to disgrace. But one can deceive no other so easily as oneself.

Occasionally, when opportunities offered, we went out together. It was foolish, you will say, and I agree with you. If folly were not pleasant it would not be so fashionable. But to this hour the relations between us were those only of close friendship. Never in my life have I addressed her by other than her married name, never have I touched her arm save by way of casual politeness.

I really think I flattered myself upon my superior virtues. I could see all the excellence but none of the stupidity of my behaviour.

About this time Mrs. Hilmer's husband died. Thenceforth she became slightly reserved in her manner. When life was a defiance she fought convention, but with safety came prudence. In fact, she told me quite candidly that my frequent visits to her house would certainly be ill-construed if they became known. I was seeking for a pretext to re-introduce her to her own set in Society when a double catastrophe occurred.

My wife discovered, as she imagined, that I was clandes-

THAT "LITTLE DISH."

How we do like a little dish of something nice, served up hot!

Charles Lamb would have sold his shirt for a tender suckling pig done to a turn. Doctor Johnson used to say that a dish of tea was the most fragrant of life's beverages. "Why, what am I a-thinking of, I shall forget my own name next," said Toby Veck, "It's tripe—the best tripe ever stewed." And his daughter Meg smilingly gave him the basket, in which reposed a hot steaming dish of his favourite meat.

"My wife prepared nice, dainty little dishes to tempt my appetite," said Mr. Henry White, of that beautiful Devon town, Torquay, "but somehow I seemed to have lost all inclination for food, and after sitting at the table trying to swallow a little, I used to say to her:

"'It's no use. I can't eat it. You may as well take it away.' This sort of thing soon told a tale, for one can't go without food for long without losing strength. Seeing my condition, a friend strongly advised me to try Seigel's Syrup. He said it had cured him, and might do me good.

"My appetite no longer needed coaxing. I could eat well-nigh everything that was put before me. Each dose seemed to give me life and vigour. To-day, no matter what ails me, Seigel's Syrup puts me right."

That "little dish" in fact, is once again the favourite.

"Some three months ago my wife got thoroughly run down. For over a fortnight she could keep nothing on her stomach." Mr. Henry White, when certifying to the truth of this on September 13th, 1900, at his house, 10 Pediford Terrace, Torquay, Devon, does not say what was the matter with his wife.

We know why the "little dish" failed to digest, and we quote the words of the famous physician to prove it: "In the nervous and irritative form of dyspepsia, this is a very prevailing symptom. As is also a sensation of sinking, as if the stomach required food, due to the fact that the food has left the stomach in a half-digested condition.

Who could enjoy a "little dish," when the food could be but half-digested? "She was troubled a good deal with wind, and seemed to be losing her strength. I fetched a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup from Holloway's Drug Stores, and she commenced taking it. In a short time she was quite well again." H'm, some men would now sell their shirt for a bottle of this remedy.

This essay, then, upon "little dishes" proves that while man and woman can in no wise *always* relish that favourite dish, yet a cure is ready to hand. One that has served men and women alike for more than the past thirty years.

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tinely occupied with another woman, and Mrs. Hilmer's brother returned from America.

It will best serve my hurried narrative if I relate events exactly as they happened, and not as they look in the light of subsequent knowledge.

Mensmore was naturally astounded to find his sister so well provided for, and gratefully accepted the help she gave him towards resuscitating his own scattered fortunes. But it did not occur to either of us that he would take the ordinary view of the queer bond existing between us, and I shall never forget his rage when he found out that I was not known to his sister's servants by my right name. It was an awkward position for all three. He was loth to allege that which we did not feel called upon to deny. But between him and me there was a marked coolness, arising from suspicion on his part and resentment on mine, coupled, I must add, with an unquiet consciousness that his attitude was not wholly unreasonable.

Mrs. Hilmer and he discussed the matter several times. He urged that this compromising friendship should be discontinued. She—a determined woman when her mind was made up—fought the suggestion on the ground of its unfairness, though, like myself, she would have been glad of any accident that might alter the position of affairs.

He interpreted her opposition to different motives. Finally, as his financial position was a dangerous one, as we afterwards learnt, and he despaired of setting things straight in Raleigh Mansions—judging them from his own point of view—he resolved to leave England again.

And now I come to the night of November 6.

It was, as you will remember, a foggy and unpleasant day. I had some business in the City which detained me until darkness set in. I had not seen Mrs. Hilmer for two days, so I resolved to drive to Sloane Square—travelling by the Underground was intolerable in such weather—and have tea with her.

I did not know then that she had gone with her maid to Brighton—intending to return that evening. It was a sudden whim she told me subsequently, and she had not even informed her servants of her intention.

The pavements in the City were slimy with the dampness of the fog, and as an empty four-wheeler passed through Cornhill I hailed it, a most unusual choice on my part. The cabman, I noticed, was fairly elevated, but as these fellows often drive better when drunk than sober, I simply told him to be careful, and jumped in. I reached Sloane Square all right, and detained the cab for my intended journey home in time for dinner.

At the door of Mrs. Hilmer's flat I met the cook and housemaid, both going out to do some shopping, probably, in the spare hour before it was time to prepare for dinner.

They knew me well, of course, and admitted me to the drawing-room, telling me that Mrs. Hilmer was out, but would surely return very shortly.

I had not been in the room a minute before the sharp double knock of a telegraph messenger brought the coachman, whom the girls left in charge of the house, to the door, and I startled the man by appearing in the hall, as he did not know of my presence.

"What is it, Simmonds?" I said, as I correctly guessed the message to be from Mrs. Hilmer.

"The missus is in Brighton, sir," he answered. "She wants the carriage to meet her at Victoria at seven o'clock. It's six now, and I ought to go round to the stables at once, but both these blessed girls have just gone out. I'm in a fair fix."

"No fix at all," I said. "I want to see Mrs. Hilmer, so I will wait here until she arrives—or, at all events, till the servants come back."

The man scratched his head, but he could think of no better plan, so he, too, went off, and I was left alone, for the first time in my life, in Mrs. Hilmer's abode. It is the small events that govern our lives, Brett, not those that stand out prominently. The shopping expedition of a couple of servant girls, intent upon securing a new cap or a few yards of calico, brought about my wife's death, caused misery to many people, and ends, I sincerely hope, in my own speedy leap into oblivion.

I picked up a novel, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," hit upon the terrible episode that culminates on Salisbury Plain, and was soon deeply interested, when another knock—this time an imperative summons long drawn out—caused me to hasten to the door.

I opened it, and in the dim light of the staircase landing did not for a second recognise the lady who stood outside.

Heaven help me, I was soon enlightened. My wife's voice was bitterly contemptuous as she said:

"You don't keep a footman, it appears, in your new establishment, Charles."

Had I been suddenly struck blind, or paralysed, I could not have been more dumfounded that I was at Delia's unexpected appearance. A thorough scoundrel might, perhaps, have thought of the best thing to say. I blurted out the worst.

"What are you doing *here?*" I stammered when my tongue recovered its use.

"No doubt you resent my appearance," she cried in a high shrill tone I had never before heard from her, "but I shall not trouble you further. I merely came to confirm with my own eyes what my ears refused to entertain. Now I am satisfied."

She half-turned with the intention of reaching the street, but rendered desperate by the absurdity of my position, I gripped her arm and pulled her forcibly into the entrance-hall, closing and bolting the door behind us.

"You have seen too much not to see more," I cried. "I will not allow you to ruin both our lives by a mere suspicion."

She was in a furious temper, but her sense of propriety—for she did not not know that the servants' quarters were empty—restrained her until we had both entered the drawing-room.

Then she burst upon me with a torrent of words.

CHAPTER XXX.

Sir Charles Lyle Ends His Narrative.

"A mere suspicion, indeed!" she said, and there was that in her voice which warned me that I had better try unarmed to control a tigress than a wife who deemed herself wronged; "these are pretty *suspicions* that surround you. A house tenanted by another woman where you are evidently master! A mistress who left the ranks of the ballet, or something of the sort, living in luxury on means supplied by you! A married woman who casts off her husband with her poverty, taking up with a paramour and riches! Do you think you can blind my eyes further? I have the most convincing proofs of your infamy. Do not imagine that on any specious pretext I will condone your conduct. I despise you from the depths of my heart. Henceforth I will strive to forget your very existence."

"Delia," I said, and if she had not been blinded with passion she must have been affected by my earnestness, "will you not listen to me?"

"Why should I? What respect have you shown to me that I should now seem even to accept your excuses?"

"I appeal to you not to do anything in anger. You have good reason to be enraged with me. I only ask you to suspend your final judgment. Hear what I have to say, take time for deliberation, for further inquiry, and then condemn me to any punishment you think fit."

She did not answer me. Her eyes were roving round the comfortable room and taking stock of every indication of poor Mrs. Hilmer's artistic aptitude. The place was eminently home-like, much more so than our elegant mansion in Portman Square, and my wife noted the fact with momentarily increasing bitterness. Yet I essayed my

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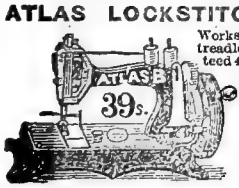

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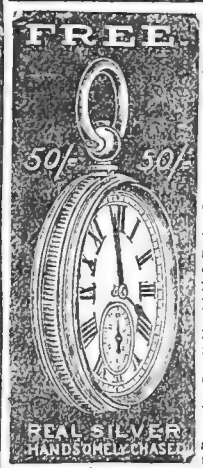

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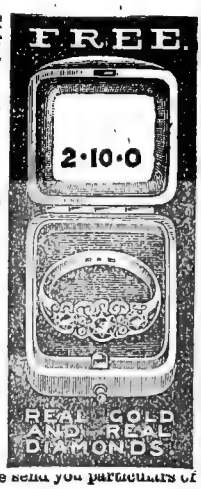

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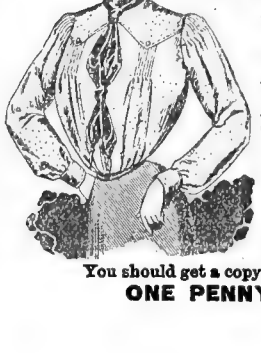

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desperate task with failing nerve and terrible consciousness of a bad cause.

"Notwithstanding all that you have seen and heard," I said, "I am not guilty of the crime you accuse me of. Mrs. Hilmer is an old friend of mine, whom I helped from a state of misery to one of comfort and comparative happiness. She is as pure-minded in thought, as spotless in character, as you are yourself. You are doing her a grevious injustice by doubting the relations between her and me. If you only knew her——"

My wife laughed scornfully.

"Pray spare yourself, Charles. I have never seen you so interested before, but you lie badly nevertheless."

"I do not lie. Before Heaven I am telling you the truth."

"You are even willing to perjure yourself, *Colonel Montgomery?*"

My poor armour was ill-fitted for this stroke. I suppose I must have flinched before it, for she went on:

"You see I am well posted. My detectives have done their work well. Oh, Heaven, that I should ever have learnt to love a vile wretch like you. I thought you were fond of me, at least. I tried hard to bend my own wishes to sympathy with yours, and I dreamt even of ultimate success. I knew you did not care much for me, but the devotion of a slave has at times been rewarded with the affection of her master. Fortunately I am a slave by choice. It only required experience to break my bonds, and you have supplied the experience."

For the first time in my life did it dawn upon me that my self-contained and haughty wife harboured other thoughts for me than a sentiment of respect for an indulgent and easily-controlled husband. It was a shock to me, a deeper humiliation than she dreamt of. How could I expiate the past, wipe out this record of error and folly, but not of ill-doing, and live happily with her so long as Providence was pleased to spare us? Whilst these things ran through my brain she suddenly turned on me.

"You fear exposure in the law courts! You dread your name figuring in a Society scandal! How little you know me. You naturally compare me by your own contemptible standard. I left your house to-night determined never to return to it should I find you here, as in all probability, I was told, would be the case. I will go to my sister until I have determined upon my future life. You, at least, will never by my desire see or hear from me again. Thus far, I presume, I will fall in with your views."

She would have passed me, but I held fast to the inside of the door. If once she got away from me I might never be able to set affairs even tolerably right. Better, I deemed, have one trying scene in the hope that she would calm down in the face of facts than allow her to carry the quarrel to her relatives and strengthen her attitude by their natural support.

"Delia," I said, "you shall not go."

"How can you dare to detain me?" she shrieked, and the glint in her eyes showed how thoroughly her passions were aroused.

"You can separate from me if you will. I shall not venture to hinder you. But I swear that you will not do this rash act without full knowledge. I tell you you must remain here. When you leave this house you do so in my company."

"And why am I to be kept a prisoner?"

"Mrs. Hilmer will return in less than an hour. You have sought this meeting yourself. Very well. You shall have it. When your charges have been thoroughly thrashed out in the presence of Mrs. Hilmer and myself I will then accompany you where you will, and leave you under the protection of your sister or any one else you choose should you still persist in leaving me."

Of course, my action was unwise to the last degree. But remember, Brett, that during these last awful five minutes I had seen a side of my wife's nature that had been hidden from me for six long years. And I was a man suddenly plunged into a raging sea, drifting helplessly I knew not whither. All that consumed me was a wild desire for such scant justice as I deserved. I had erred, but my faults were not those my wife alleged against me.

If she was angry before she was now absolutely uncontrollable.

"What?" she screamed. "Remain to meet your—your mistress? Never, whilst I have life."

She flung herself upon me so suddenly that she tore me away from the door. She was a strong and athletic woman, and I suppose she expected some resistance, for she used such force as to drag me forward into the middle of the room, overturning a chair in the effort. I was so utterly taken by surprise that I yielded to her violence more completely than she expected.

She staggered, let go her hold, and fell heavily backwards, tripping over the fallen chair. I made a desperate attempt to save her, but only caught the end of a fur necklet, and it tore off like a spider's web.

Her body crashed against a Venetian fender, and her head came with awful force against a sort of support for the fire-irons that stood up a foot from the ground.

Then she rolled over, her eyes and face undergoing a ghastly change, and instantly became, as I thought, unconscious.

I knelt beside her, raising her head with my right hand, and brokenly beseeching her to speak to me, when I would at once do anything she asked me. But she gave no sign of animation. In a frenzy of despair, I forced myself to examine her injuries, and my heart nearly stopped beating when I discovered that a large piece of iron had been driven into her brain through the back of the head.

I knew in a moment that she was dead. Although I have not had much experience of that terrible epoch in the human being, I have seen far too much of death in animal life not to know that she who had been my honoured and respected wife now lay before me a mere soulless entity—a symbol only of the splendid vital creature who, a minute earlier, was angrily protesting against the supposed faithlessness of her mate.

Looking back now upon the events of that fateful night, I marvel at the appalling coolness which came to my aid as soon as I realised the extent of the misfortune which had befallen both Delia and myself. I can fully understand what is meant by the callousness of certain criminals or the indifference to inevitable death betrayed by Eastern races. No sooner was I quite assured that my wife was dead—dead beyond hope or doubt—than I regained the use of my reasoning faculties in the most marvellously cold-blooded degree.

The actual difficulties of my position were enormous. I arraigned myself before a judge and jury, and saw clearly that every circumstance which contributed towards Delia's suspicions in the first instance were now magnified a hundredfold by the manner and scene of her death.

Before me, in ghostly panorama, moved the dread crowd of witnesses against me, the degradation of my family, the bitter and vengeful feelings of my wife's relatives, the suffering of poor unconscious Mrs. Hilmer, the whole avalanche of horror and misery which this unfortunate accident had precipitated upon every person who claimed my relationship or friendship.

My mental attitude was quite altruistic. Could I have undone the past I would have cheerfully undergone a painful and protracted death forthwith.

But no possible atonement on my part would restore Delia to life. I knew it was quite improbable that I should be convicted of murdering her, strong as the circumstantial testimony against me must be. The mere legal consequences did not, however, weigh with me for a second. From that awful hour I felt that I was doomed personally. My only thought was to seek oblivion, not only for myself, but for all whom Delia's death might in any way affect.

(To be concluded.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A letter reaches me from "Reggie," bemoaning the "hard, humdrum spirit of the times. All the romance and adventure which used to make life interesting," he says, "have passed away, swept out of existence by our much-vaunted advance of civilization. Nowadays, one works all day, and, work being over, proceeds to *kill* the remaining hours. There is nothing else for it, for beyond the stern necessity of earning one's daily bread, existence seems to have no other serious object."

"Reggie" seems to be in a bad way. Having no knowledge of him beyond that to be gathered from the above letter, I cannot say whether he has been making an indiscreet meal of muffins and lobster salad, or whether he has been jilted. In either event such ideas as he expresses would be the natural symptoms.

Utterly false are these ideas, and "Reggie" should, Mrs. Dombey-wise, "make an effort" to shake them off.

It is a commercial age, I, of course, admit, and there are certain grim facts and duties that must be faced. But, after all, life is pretty much what we make it. There is plenty of romance and interesting adventure if we only look for it.

Cultivate a hobby, "Reggie"; collect stamps, or buy a camera. It's astonishing what a lot either will do for a man.

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Of all hobbies, reading is probably the most general, and most capable of conferring pleasure. A good, well-written novel is an antidote to "that tired feeling." It takes the reader out of his own life, and in telling him of the experiences of fictitious characters, broadens his mind, and adds to his knowledge of human nature.

Which remarks bring, by a natural process, the remembrance that I have a treat in store for you readers, in the shape of a new serial story. As I told you last week, it is called

"The Fate of Michael Standridge,"

is written by Mr. Headon Hill, and is a novel of intense interest.

It will begin the week after next, in our great Easter Holiday Number. Be quite sure that you don't miss it.

In connection with Postcard Competition, I made a promise last week, which I here redeem:

£1 1s. FOR A POST-CARD.

THERE

are lots of queer people in the world—queer in manner, speech, clothes, or method of life. We want to hear about some of them. Jot down on a post-card a short description of any peculiar man or woman that you have ever seen or heard of, and address it to

"PECULIAR,"

"Short Stories" Offices,
Henrietta Street,
Strand, W.C.

One Guinea will be sent to the Competitor who is adjudged by the Editor to have sent in the best. Attempts must reach us by Tuesday, April 9th, 1901.

There is no mistake about it, my friend the editor of the Big Budget is a real humourist. Here is a story told to me about him:

A benevolent looking gentleman entered the office, and drawing out a concealed document, said to the editor:

"I am soliciting help for a gentleman of refinement and intelligence. He is sadly in need of money, but he is too proud to let the public know it."

"You don't say so," said the editor, with animation.

"I am hopeful of securing quite a handsome little sum."

"You say this man is very intelligent, highly cultivated, and all that sort of thing?"

"That's just the kind of man he is."

"And too proud to beg?"

The visitor nodded.

"My dear friend, I appreciate your delicacy. You have described my condition precisely, but I had no idea I had enlisted your sympathy so strongly that you would take up a collection. It's all right. Just as soon as you get ten or fifteen pounds together, bring it to me, and I'll give you a receipt. Heaven bless you, my noble friend," and he gently pushed the visitor, who expected to tap the editor for a contribution, out into the street, where he, after gazing around in a dazed sort of way, kept on in his mission of mercy.

"One good turn deserves another," remarked the editor, as he resumed his seat. "The man came to help me out, and I helped him out."

Oh, yes! Old Mr. B. B. is a humourist.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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Nurse FINCH-WHITE writes from the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow: "I have very great pleasure to inform you that I have found the 'Alkan' most beneficial, and in each case instantaneous. I shall be very pleased to recommend it to anyone unfortunately afflicted with neuralgic troubles, as I cannot speak of the preparation too highly, both as regards its effect upon myself as an old sufferer from neuralgic pains, and also its effect upon those to whom I gave it. It is magical, and is deserving of the highest praise."

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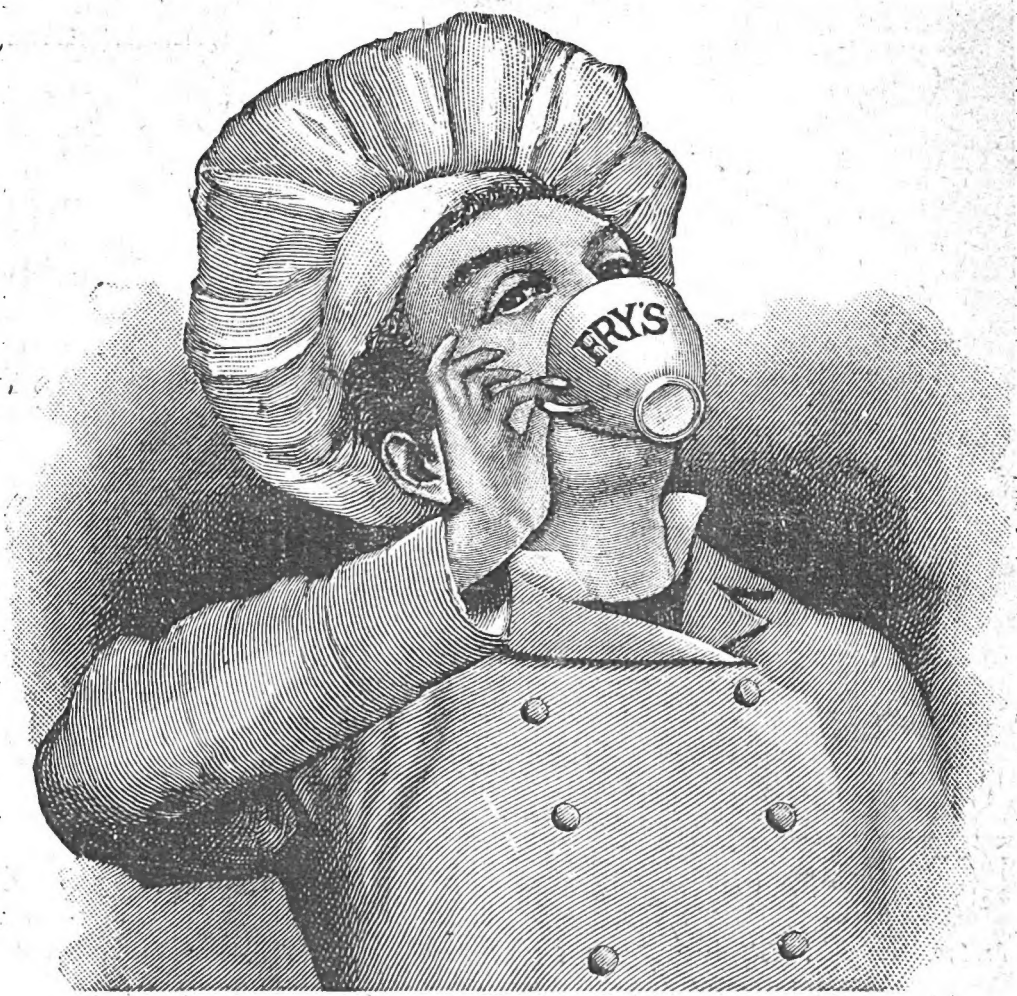

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